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Small Yard Garden Ideas

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Best-Laid Plans

Before you pick up the shovel, lay down some ideas on paper. With careful assessment and proper planting, you'll be sure to make the most of every square inch of your outdoor space.

LAY OF THE (Little) Land

Prior to digging in, take note of your surroundings to maximize the possibilities.

IN THE ZONE

Even the smallest yard can have almost everything bigger ones boast. You can make way for a sitting area adorned with string lights—the perfect place for an alfresco dinner. A lattice fence provides ample room for hanging plants, without taking up valuable floor space.

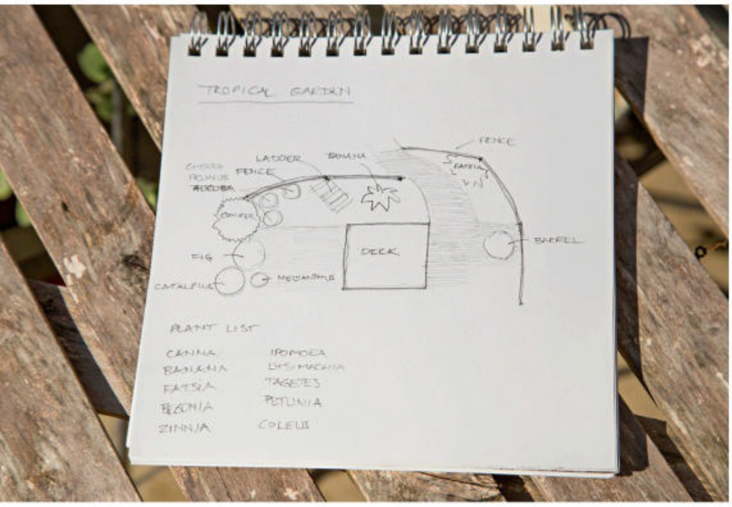
ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT WORKING WITH a small outdoor space is that you can achieve a pretty dramatic transformation with far less work and financial investment than a much larger plot. But that doesn't mean you should skip the preplanning. For those new to gardening, take some walks around your neighborhood, local parks, nurseries and botanical gardens. Ask questions about plants that strike your fancy and find out about maintenance and ideal growing conditions. You'll find that most gardeners love nothing more than talking shop.

While knowing what generally works in your area is great, you'll also need to take site specific things into consideration—how much sun your yard gets, the state of your soil, how much rain you get and the scale considerations that come with limited space. Here, some food for thought:

- **Track the Sun** All plants need direct sunlight, but some require more than others. There are those that thrive in full sun (at least six hours of sunlight), part shade/part sun (four to six hours of direct sunlight) or full shade (fewer than four hours of direct sunlight. If you live in a particularly hot climate, it's helpful to provide plants with some shade in late summer and fall, even if they're designated "full sun." Once you know how much sun your small plot gets, you'll be more successful in selecting plants. Keep in mind, the amount of direct sunlight changes with the seasons and

STOCK UP

Even tiny gardens need regular maintenance. Make sure you're armed with the basics, including a watering can and hose, various tools, a wheelbarrow, a hat and gloves.



GRAB A PENCIL

Once you've got the sun and soil figured out and have managed to set expectations and become well equipped, start sketching. When you're working with a small area, it's best to have a plan in place so you know where everything goes and you can avoid overcrowding. Do you really need a pergola and a fountain? Is that magnolia tree you're dying to have going to encroach on the outdoor dining area? Are you interested in monochromatic or more of a country garden feel? Make a detailed drawing so there will be fewer missteps along the way.

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could also diminish as your garden matures and plants become taller and more lush.

• **Study the Soil** The best soils are loamy—a mix of 20% clay, 40% silt and 40% sand. High quality soil will provide great drainage, which allows plenty of oxygen, water and nutrients to get down to a plant's roots. It's very unlikely that you just so happen to have the perfect soil—and that's okay! There are plenty of ways to improve it, or you can skip it altogether and build raised beds, or bring in containers and plant store bought mixes.

If you're curious about the exact makeup of your soil, send a sample to your local cooperative extension (nifa.usda.gov). For a nominal fee, they'll send back a detailed analysis, as well as practical recommendations for improvement.

• **Read the Small Print** Knowing the "common" name for a plant isn't always enough—it's best to know the plant's genus and species, too, because what you think of as "coral bells," someone else might call something else. That's where plant labels come in. They feature the genus name (*Heuchera*) and the species (*sanguinea*, for example), along with a cultivar name ('White Cloud'), so you'll always know exactly what you're buying. Labels let you know how much sun, soil, water and care a plant will need to thrive. But they also offer specifics about how tall and wide a plant is expected to become, which is important when space is limited.

BALANCE THE SCALE

Just as you want to avoid planting trees that dwarf your house and plot of land, you should also stay away from oversized furnishings meant for grander grounds. Shop vintage or try online purveyors like Wayfair and Overstock for brand new, petite options.

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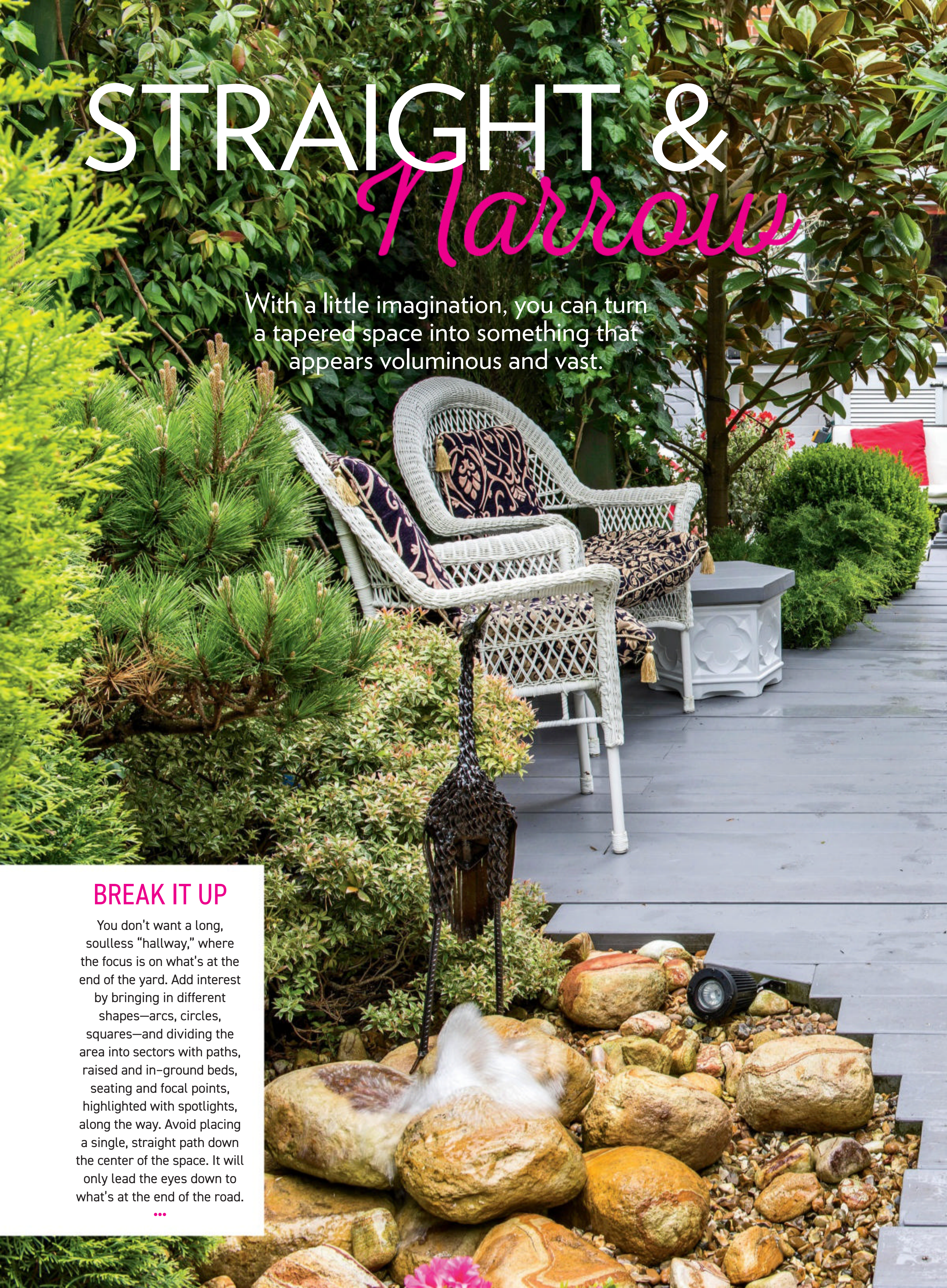
• **Consider Seasons That Aren't Spring** When you're picking flowers for your beds and containers, look at the leaves. It's nice to be able to enjoy the color and texture of beautiful foliage even when the flowers aren't in bloom. Shrubs, trees, grasses and plants with winter berries will also add color to your garden long after the tulips have peaced out.

• **Look at Your Life** Be realistic about the time you have to devote to gardening. Too busy to prune and fertilize? Consider low maintenance plants like coneflowers and ornamental grasses. Install automatic sprinklers if you're unwilling to haul around a hose. And if you're always entertaining on the patio, choose tough plants for borders and strong containers that can tolerate some tramples.

The best way to choose plants that make sense for your yard is to assess your lifestyle. If you're not into deadheading or too busy to water in the mornings, high-maintenance picks aren't for you.

STRAIGHT & *Narrow*

With a little imagination, you can turn a tapered space into something that appears voluminous and vast.



BREAK IT UP

You don't want a long, soulless "hallway," where the focus is on what's at the end of the yard. Add interest by bringing in different shapes—arcs, circles, squares—and dividing the area into sectors with paths, raised and in-ground beds, seating and focal points, highlighted with spotlights, along the way. Avoid placing a single, straight path down the center of the space. It will only lead the eyes down to what's at the end of the road.

BE REALISTIC

When you're planning, you may be very optimistic about your bandwidth, but the truth of the matter is that the patch of land that's the farthest away will likely get the least amount of attention. Plant varieties down there that don't require tons of water or an abundance of pruning, lest it become a sad wasteland. Even better, consider setting up a she (or he!)-shed or a seating area—some kind of spot that invites people to come on down.

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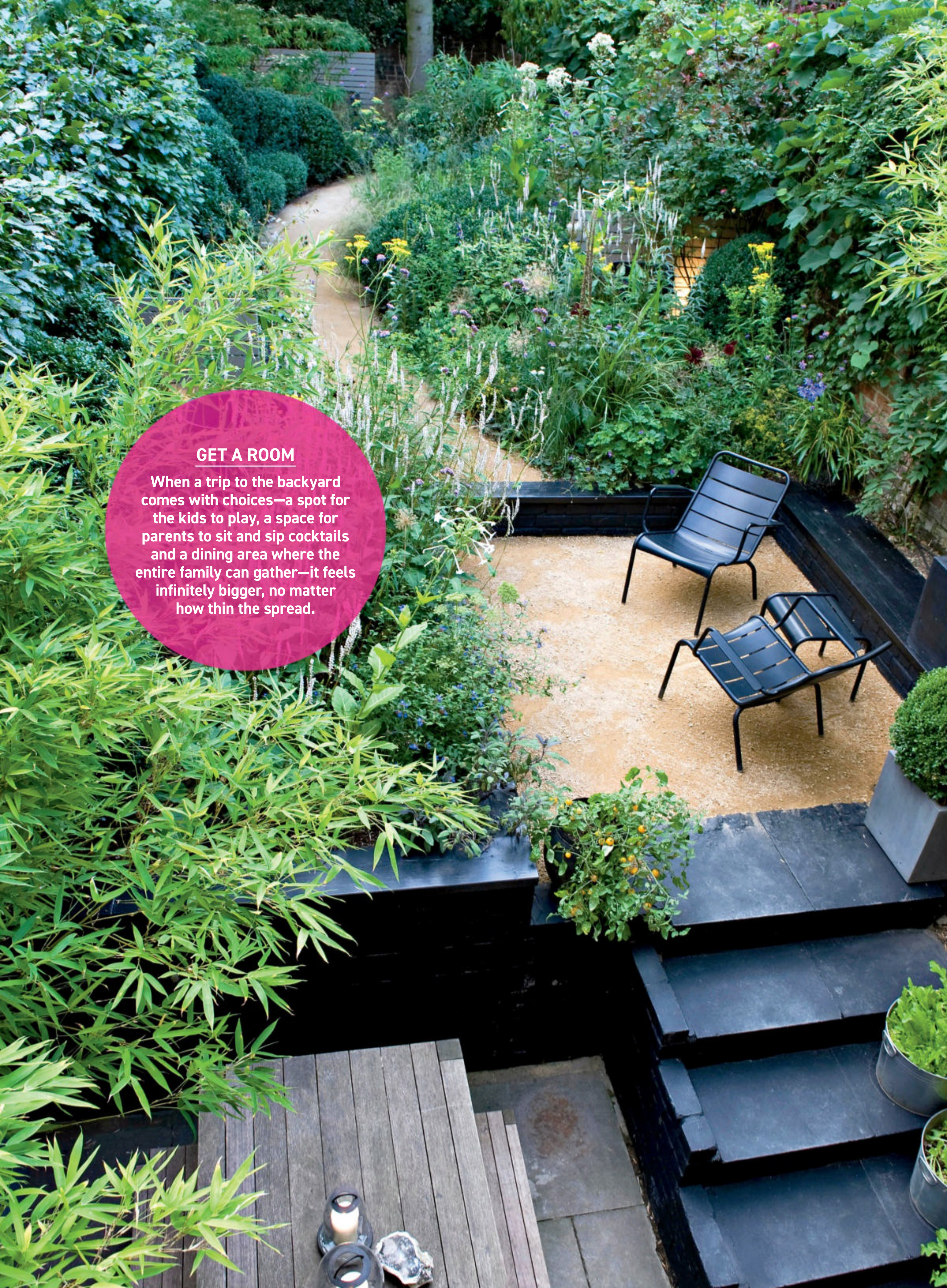
IF YOU HAVE A BACKYARD THAT can best be described as "slim shady" or a "long, hot spot," take heart. There are several things you can do to transform it into a well-rounded area that's teeming with life. First things first, resist the urge to simply give in. Adding curves and height to a garden design will automatically make it more interesting. And don't devote too much room to the practical. Yes, you can carve out a spot for storage, garbage cans and compost bins, but don't sacrifice valuable square footage for all boring and no beauty. After all, what's the point of having outdoor space if it leans more compost than communal? When it comes time to design, try to create sectors and designate a use for each space. Maybe placing a chaise in the lawn area makes it a reading "room." Add a petite jungle gym, and suddenly it's a kid-friendly zone. Furnish an area with a dining table, and you've got a go-to spot for enjoying alfresco meals. You can use trellises, screens or lighting to define certain spaces, or stick with landscaping cues like the lawn, shrubs or trees.

Sunlight is a factor in every garden, but in a courtyard garden, too much exposure to intense rays can ruin the fun. If you need to create shade, plant a few well-scaled trees (see page 42) that will eventually allow you to actually enjoy the great outdoors without suffering from heat stroke. Trees are also a beautiful way to create privacy, which will be much appreciated if your lot is small and your neighbors are practically right on top of you.

A long and narrow plot can offer plenty of opportunities for surprise and delight. Carve out a relaxing nook by filling a corner with foliage that just barely hides a lovely chair. Or perhaps you place a bench just beyond a box hedge. You don't need a wide berth to steal away and read a book in a somewhat secret getaway.



GET A ROOM

When a trip to the backyard comes with choices—a spot for the kids to play, a space for parents to sit and sip cocktails and a dining area where the entire family can gather—it feels infinitely bigger, no matter how thin the spread.

REAL GARDENS Have Curves

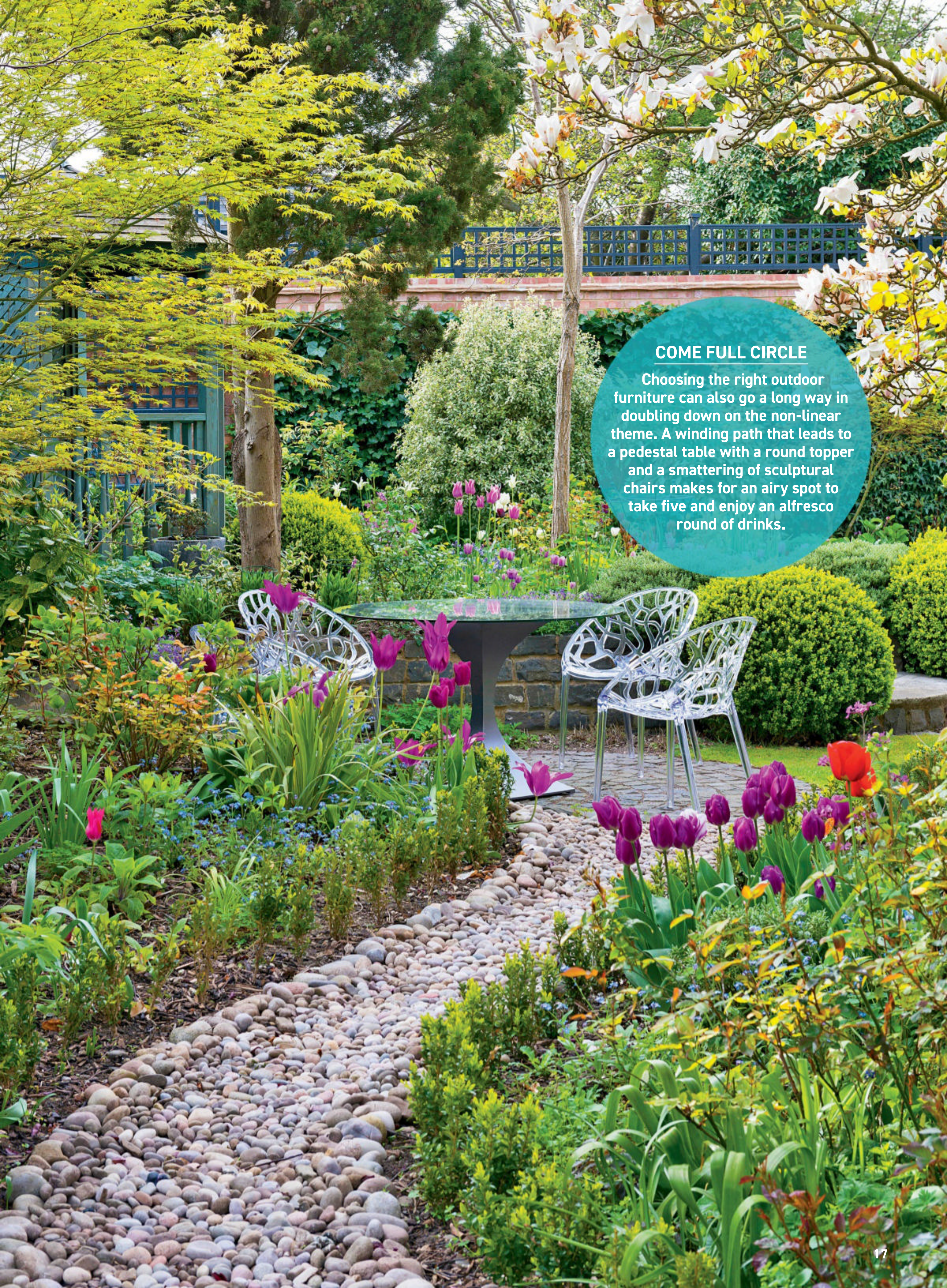
To add visual interest and make the most out of tight spots, color outside of the lines.

THERE'S A REASON MOST gardeners lean into designing outdoor spaces with curved beds—especially in small spots. Curves are generally more interesting than their linear counterparts, and they create the illusion of having more space. They also tie awkward and not-ready-for-prime-time areas together nicely. You can create a path that encircles an awkward seating area or pop in a curved bed that hides an unsightly corner or a fence that needs help.

As you begin getting down and dirty, remember that you'll need a boundary between your beds and that petite patio, fence or grassy knoll. A curved edge keeps everything unified, and a good, sharp line keeps grass and weeds away from your precious plants. And make things interesting—just as good garden design is all about variety in plants, there should be a variety of dimensions in your yard.

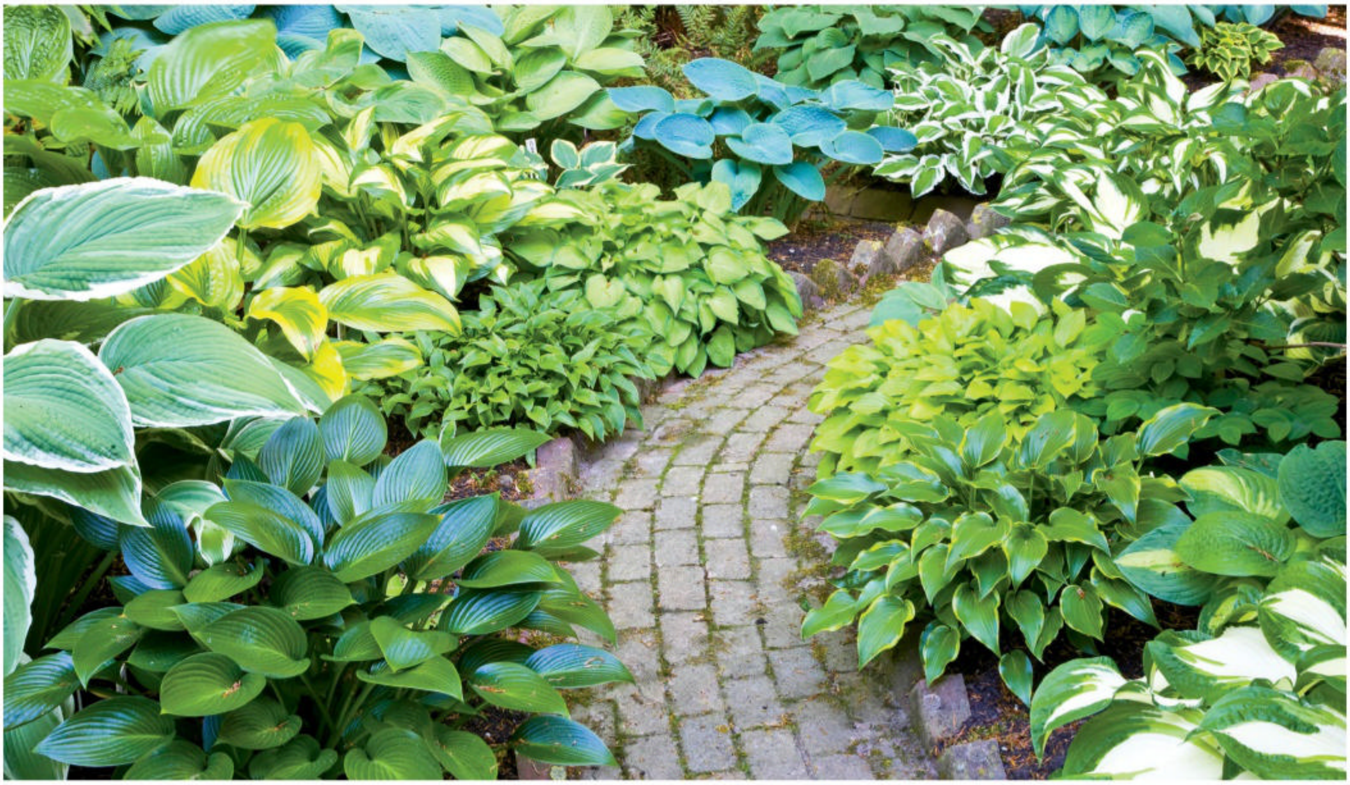
TRACE IT!

Get creative with your curves by mapping them out with a hose, string, rope, or even chalk, and then dig in.



COME FULL CIRCLE

Choosing the right outdoor furniture can also go a long way in doubling down on the non-linear theme. A winding path that leads to a pedestal table with a round topper and a smattering of sculptural chairs makes for an airy spot to take five and enjoy an alfresco round of drinks.

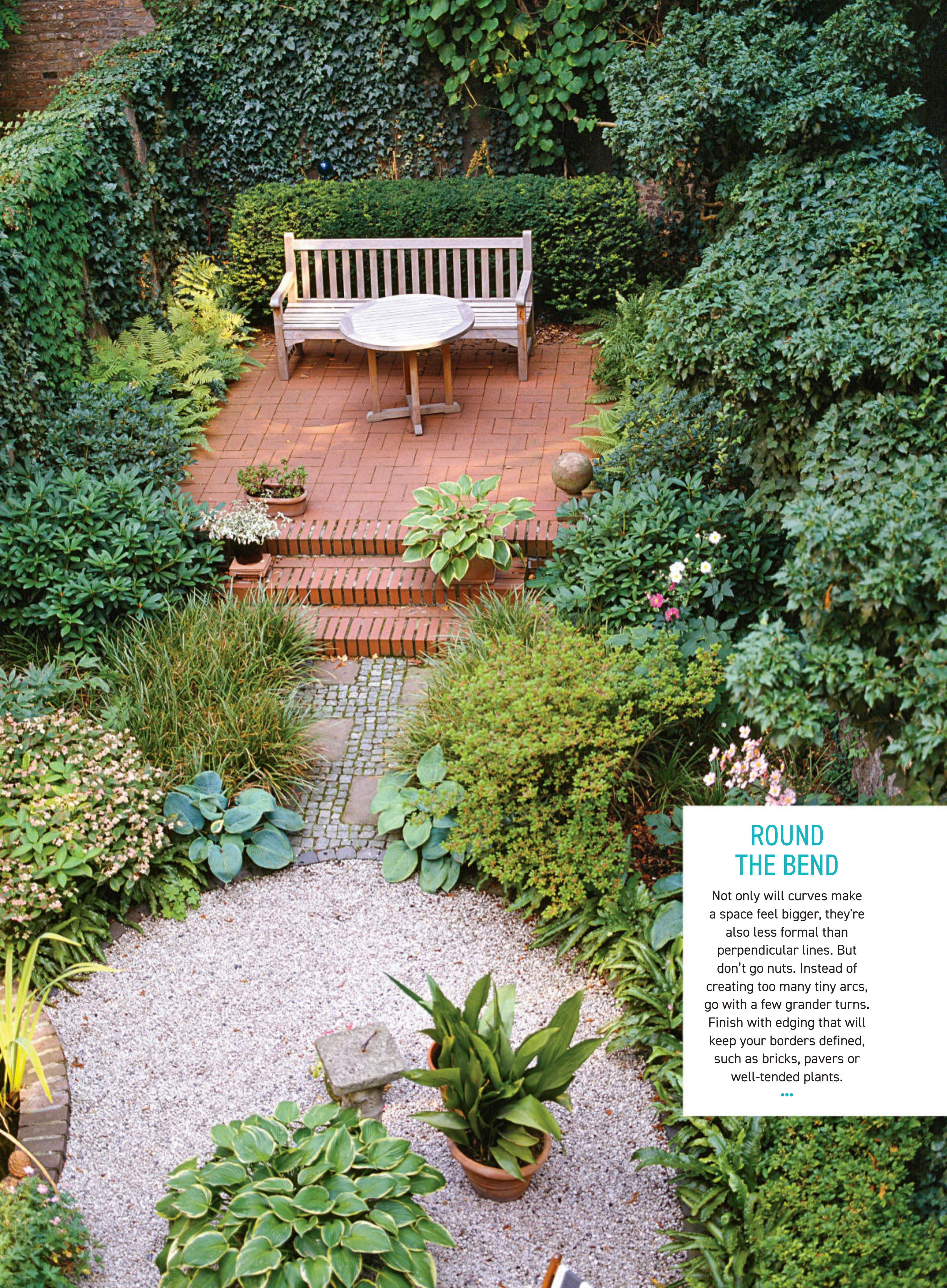


PRIMP THE PERIMETER

Create a living, breathing, colorful border on the edge of your beds with a variety of plants. Try planting lower-maintenance perennial flowers as borders and supplement with annuals to add extra pops of color.

Start shape-shifting with these tips:

- **Get to Cutting** Once your border design is laid out, cut just inside the hose (string, rope, etc.). Use a spade or, for an easier go of it, use a manual, half moon edger or electrical edger/trencher for greater mobility and circular blades that automatically make cleaner cuts into the soil. At less than $100, an electrical edger is a good investment if you have especially large and/or multiple beds.
- **You Can Dig It** Use a spade or a trowel to remove all the loosened turf. Add it to the compost pile or take it away to keep grass from invading your beds. Dig the trench to about 4 to 6 inches deep, and then use garden shears to clean up lines and remove any stray blades of grass. A good, deep, physical border will help with drainage and stop any errant roots from growing into the bed.
- **March Out the Mulch** Spread in about 2 to 3 inches of mulch, but avoid piling it to the same grade as the grass. A little separation will help keep weeds out of your beds.
- **Give Everything Some Space** Don't crowd additional plants right up to the edge. Give the border some breathing room to create true separation between bed and lawn.



ROUND THE BEND

Not only will curves make a space feel bigger, they're also less formal than perpendicular lines. But don't go nuts. Instead of creating too many tiny arcs, go with a few grander turns. Finish with edging that will keep your borders defined, such as bricks, pavers or well-tended plants.

LET THERE *Be Light*

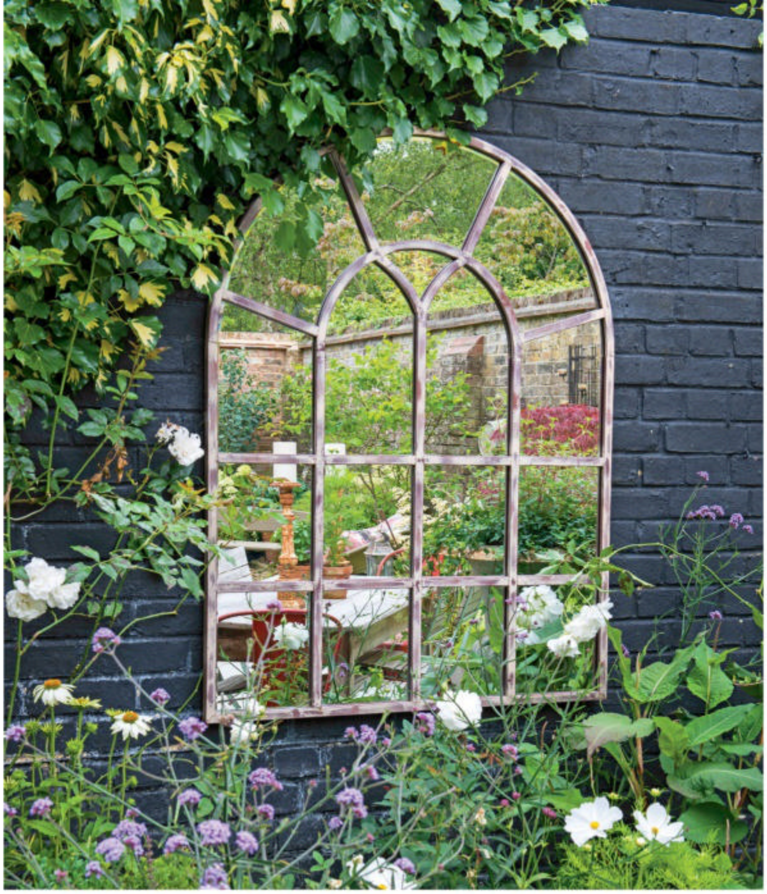
Got a tiny tract that's a little on the dark side? These easy tricks and picks promise to brighten things up.

FLIP A SWITCH

Yes, it's perhaps the most obvious way to illuminate a dark space, but that doesn't mean it's not effective. You can go with a professionally installed system that spotlights and highlights, but it's also possible to bring in just right mood lighting rather simply with outdoor candles and strings of fairy lights.

DISPLAY YARD ART

Not only does a whimsical piece brighten the mood, depending on the material and color, it can also add a much needed contrast to a dark and dreary area. Just make sure to keep scale top of mind. The last thing you need is a too large piece that will make limited space feel even more cramped.



HOLD UP A MIRROR

These super-stylish elements go a long way in reflecting and refracting light, which can make a space look larger and more populated with plants than it really is. If you'd like your looking glass to last more than one growing season, you may need to weatherproof it by applying a mirror edge sealer, available at most hardware stores.

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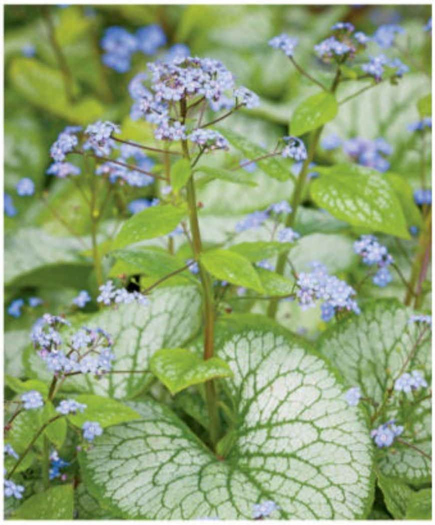
Made in the Shade

Bring a little color to the shadows with these picks.

Make no mistake, all plants need sun, but some require less. When you're shopping for plants, a tag should let you know how much direct sunlight is ideal—that could be full sun (at least six hours a day), partial sun (three to six hours a day) or full shade (fewer than three hours). If you're feeling a little uneasy about planting in a darker spot, put your plants in containers. Vessels offer another opportunity to add color and personality to your garden, and you can scoot them to sunnier spots if plants start to look like they could use some extra rays.



BRUNNERA

***Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost'**

Handsome, hairy leaves and blue flowers make for great ground cover in sun dappled spots.

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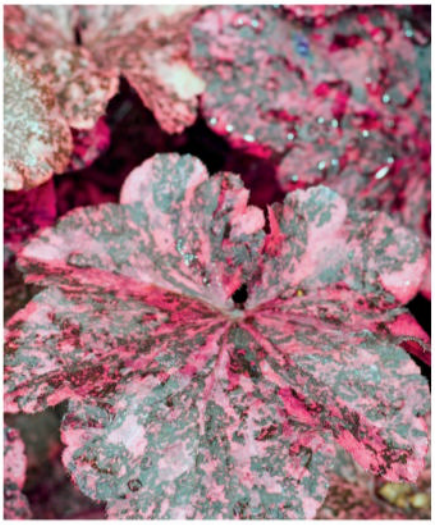

CORAL BELLS

***Heuchera* 'Midnight Rose'**

Enjoy these dark-purple leaves in containers, beds, borders and even along paths for extra flair.

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BRUSH ON THE WHITE-OUT

Add highlights to a dreary spot by applying crisp white to a fence, wall or even some lawn furniture. You can also plant a spray of white blooms, which will make a big impact in the summer. Just take care to choose flowers that can handle some shade, such as alyssum, begonias and impatiens.

* * *

GREET SOME GRAVEL

Layering in some pretty pebbles to beds, containers or even on a pathway is an easy and unexpected way to add vibrancy to the shadows. You can find an abundance of boldly colored stones on Amazon for about $10 a pound.

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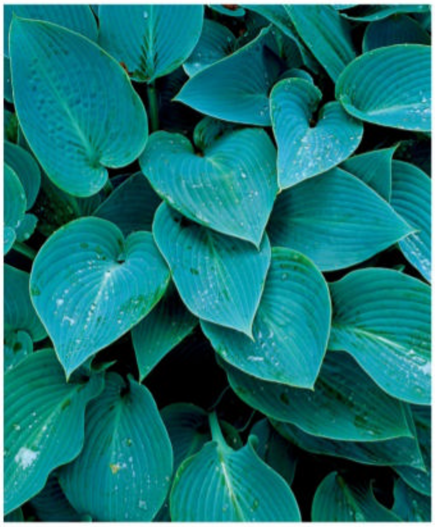

HOSTA

***Hosta* 'Halcyon'**

Add dramatic, spear-shaped foliage with this cultivar that's hardy in USDA Zones 3 to 9.

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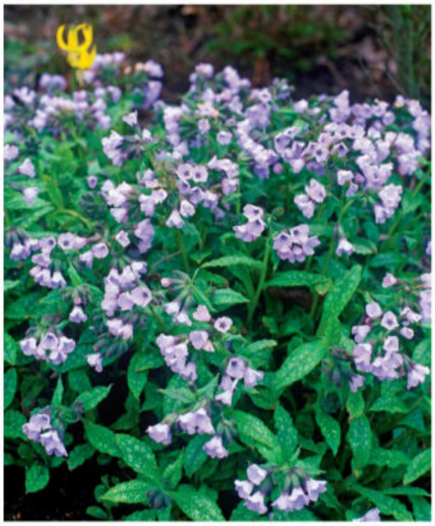

LUNGWORT

Pulmonaria officinalis

Enjoy green-and-white leaves and dainty blooms in sites that range from full sun to full shade.

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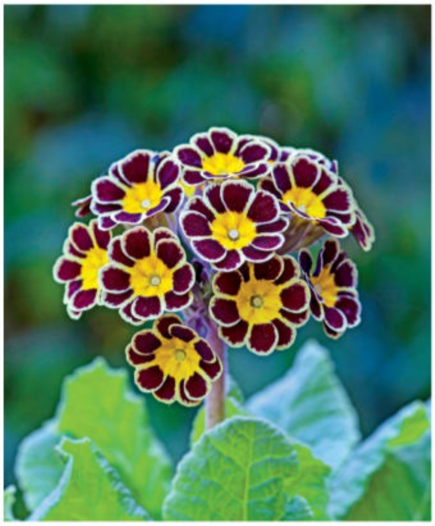


PRIMROSE

***Primula* 'Gold Lace'**

Plant these gold-and-purple posies in rich, moist, well-draining soil in partial shade.

* * *

HOT *Spots*

Looking for a little relief from the sun on your patch of paradise? Here, a few stylish solutions that will throw some shade your way.

IT'S CURTAINS FOR YOU

Whether you buy premade or invest in a little high performance fabric or a hardworking canvas for some one of a kind outdoor drapes, these panels can work wonders. They'll help block out the sun, bring a little softness to a concrete patio, create privacy and carve out "rooms" within a single space.

BEAT THE HEAT

Prevent a seating area from becoming a sauna with high tech solutions like misters and electric awnings or low cost fixes like colorful umbrellas, ceiling fans and natural fiber outdoor rugs placed beneath furniture to help absorb heat.

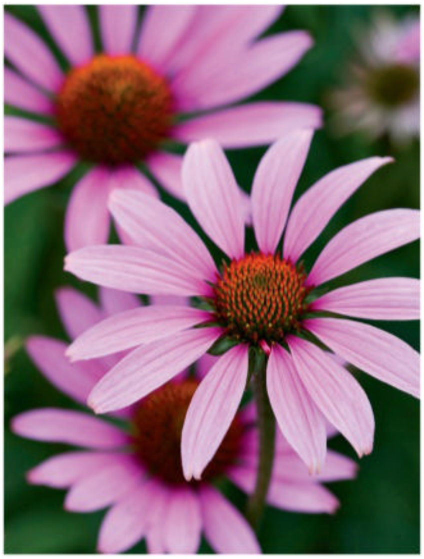
SHOCK AND AWNING

Cover up a blazing balcony with a far reaching overhang in a variety of shapes, styles and materials like canvas, polyester, cotton and plastic. If you want to spend a little extra cash, you can even buy a motorized, retractable model. Bonus: In addition to providing shade, awnings can also take as much as 25% off your electric bills.

Sun Lovers

These fine flowers are tough enough for ultra bright conditions.

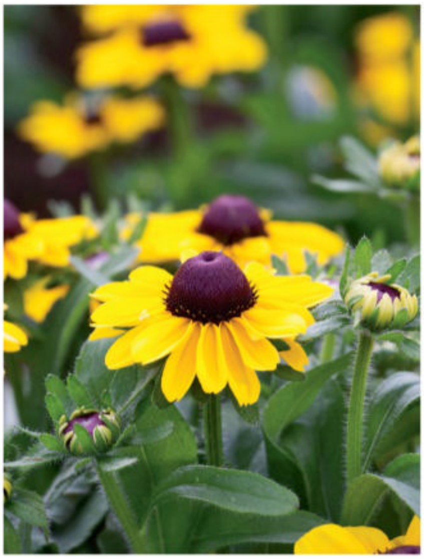
While you may think you know how much sun every inch of your back yard gets, you might be surprised at how intense the light really is throughout the day. That's why many gardeners choose to do a test, taking a day to note how much direct sunlight a specific spot gets every hour with flags or a simple pad of paper and pen. You can also buy a light meter at a local nursery. But remember: Nothing is forever! Sunlight changes with the seasons, and, too, as lush trees and shrubs begin to grow, a sunny spot can transform into a shade garden.



CONEFLOWER

Echinacea purpurea

Great for bold borders, they're hardy in USDA Zones 5 to 8.



BLACK-EYED SUSAN

Rudbeckia

These drought tolerant beauties love sunshine and attract butterflies.

SAIL AWAY

For a shipshape solution, look to the sea—or more specifically, to a shade sail. These apparatuses do indeed look like a sail positioned between different poles. Fast and easy to erect, they come in lots of sizes and materials, and are fairly inexpensive.

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PER(GOLA) YOUR REQUEST

With a bit of handiwork, you can combine an artificial structure and some nature-made goodness to beat the heat. A classic arbor dresses up an outdoor dining area and provides an escape from unrelenting heat when paired with a climber. (See page 46 for vine ideas.)

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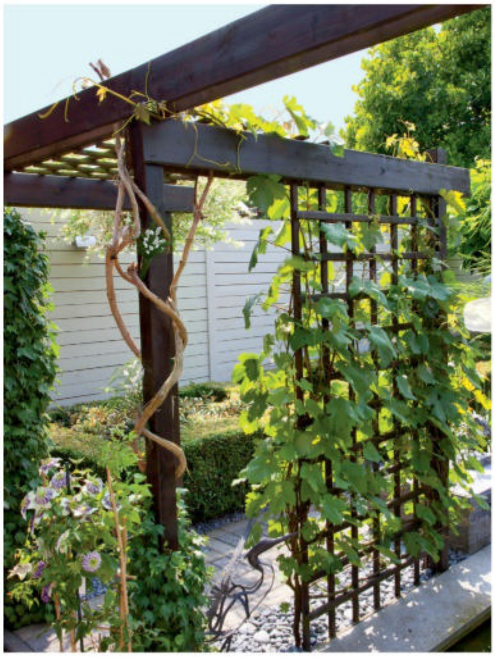

HOLLYHOCK

Alcea rosea

An annual in most zones, they thrive in direct sun—the more, the better!

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MARIGOLD

***Tagetes* ‘Durango Bee’**

These bold annuals can even handle reflected heat if watered regularly.

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ZINNIA

Zinnia elegans

In hotter climes, these flowers might require a little afternoon shade.

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PAY *Dirt*

When your outdoor area is more concrete than cultivated, it's time to get creative about softening those hard edges and bringing a little life to the patio party.

LOOK UP

Sometimes there's not a lot of ground to cover. That's when you get vertical. That can mean mounting a trellis and growing a "living wall" with classic roses or edibles like thyme, chamomile and nasturtium; gathering greenery on a boring wall or fence; or building a pergola above an outdoor dining table and draping it with charming climbers like bougainvillea or clematis.

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JUST BECAUSE YOU LACK A BIG back yard—or any land at all, really—that doesn't mean that you're out of luck when it comes to beautifying what little outdoor space you have, whether that's a petite and paved balcony in a big city high rise or a concrete patio that takes up almost the entirety of the "yard" behind a town house or cottage. With a little imagination and access to a steady stream of sunshine, delicious veggies, gorgeous flowers and fabulous foliage will flourish in even the smallest of spaces.

A few things to consider: If the idea of lugging a watering can around is troubling, consider getting a drip irrigation system, which you can find on Amazon for as little as $20. Basically, it hooks right into your spigot and waters all your plantings at once with minimal effort. And if you're a renter, make sure that your lease allows you to plant a garden, and check to see if there are specified weight limits for items on a balcony. Use common sense: Why test a somewhat rickety third floor balcony's boundaries with a too heavy, solid concrete planter filled to the brim with soil and an abundance of lush plants?

For the ultimate urban garden, give the green light to some of these ideas.

MIND THE GAP

Stop cursing those pesky cracks in your concrete patio base or the uneven crevices sported by a stairwell or walkway. These "defects" can be freshened up with a heaping helping of tough greenery like thyme, pinks, rock roses or creeping Jenny.

GREEN SCREEN

Submerge and soak the roots of plants well in water before planting them in cracks. After a good soak, insert roots where you want them and surround with compost. Water generously and soon imperfections are an eyesore no more.

GO TO POT

It's simple: If something can hold soil, it's pretty much plant-worthy. That means you can add a ton of personality with anything from vintage colanders and graphic food tins to sophisticated terra cotta pots and stately stone containers. Only have room the size of a teacup? Not a problem. You can literally plant a succulent in a vintage sipper, and voila, you have a garden. When pairing plants and pots, remember to make sure that vessels are deep enough for healthy root growth and allow for proper drainage so the soil won't dry out too quickly or stay too wet and cause root rot.

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OUTSOURCE YOUR RESOURCES

If you find that your outdoor space isn't up to even the slightest of gardens (or if you don't have an outdoor space at all), there's no need to give up on greenery in your life. Community gardens are a great alternative where you can take part in the joys of growing fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs on a city- or privately-owned lot. Not only will you enjoy the literal fruits of your labor, you can also make friends and learn a lot along the way. While there's generally a fee to participate, membership often comes with extras like educational programs. You can find a communal space near you by asking around at local schools and nurseries or check out the websites communitygarden.org and localharvest.org.

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GIVE YOURSELF A RAISE

There are many advantages of raised beds over their in ground siblings, not the least of which is that you can add a bunch of personality and place them right on top of paved spaces. Even better, you can control growing conditions by filling them with a blend of compost and high quality topsoil. You can also take advantage of the very best conditions your yard has to offer—full sun, protection from high winds and proximity to the waterspout. Just make sure to place the beds in a level spot and figure out the drainage situation so you don't incur any water damage.

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Small-Scale Solutions

What you lack in space, you more than make up for in options. Pretty up the plainest plot with these spot-on ideas.

HIGH *Heights*

Transform your plain old flat plain into a multilevel playing field.

VERTICAL VIEW

If you put taller plants in the background, with the smaller ones in front, that will provide depth to your beds, but too many vertical elements can make for a messy, cluttered appearance. And if your house is small, don't go too tall!

JUST BECAUSE YOUR BACK YARD could hardly be described as bucolic, that doesn't mean that it has to be boring. There are plenty of ways to make it feel more interesting, including the creation of different "levels" within the space. That could mean bringing in a landscape architect to design and install heightened hardscapes for dining and playing, or it could be as simple as piling up some dirt and thoughtfully planting some well-placed, well-scaled trees and climbers (see pages 42 and 46). These highlights will bring drama and depth to a space, but many have some practical advantages as well—they can hide eyesores like old fences or air conditioners that really stand out in a small yards. You can also control the soil and conditions that come with raised beds and tall containers, which means you have a better shot at thriving plants. But remember, not everything deserves a raise. Just as having too many elements at ground level is a yawn, so, too, is taking everything up a notch.

CHANGE THE GRADE

With just a little elbow grease, you can create a berth and complement it with some evergreens to create higher ground. Digging 8-inch-deep basins and then creating piles and mounds will go a long way in livening up a flat expanse.

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HANG IN THERE

It's a pleasure to enjoy pretty posies at eye level. Hanging planters add height and movement to the garden, and they're less susceptible to damage from pests. But they also dry out faster, which means you'll need to water more frequently.

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STEP IT UP

Give your vessels an extra boost while adding a little drama to a flat bed with risers. You can bring in fancy stone models or achieve great heights by placing pots on vintage stools, shelving or crates.

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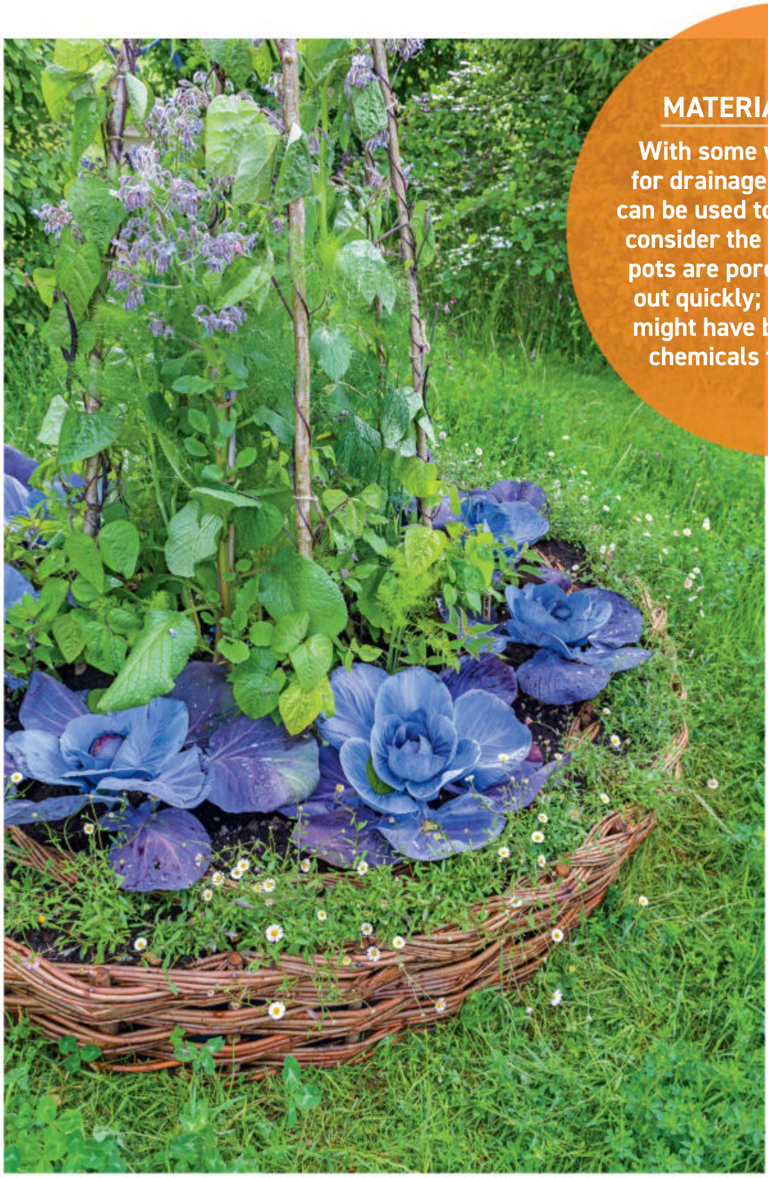
RAISE THE ANTE

If you have troublesome soil plagued by too much sand or clay, or too many rocks, raised ground beds are a winning alternative. You can bring in high quality soil and add dimension with raised beds.

•••

TRELLISES & PERGOLAS

With a little imagination, these tall treasures look great, even before climbers get started. Whether you pick a pretty wood or a sleek metal, it's best to choose a structure that enhances the architecture of your home.



MATERIAL MATTERS

With some well-placed holes for drainage, almost anything can be used to grow edibles, but consider the make. Terra cotta pots are porous, so they'll dry out quickly; reclaimed woods might have been treated with chemicals that are unsafe.

IN GOOD *Taste*

You don't need farm-level acreage to grow fresh produce and tasty herbs! Just carve out a little room on the patio or yard, and you'll have food, glorious food, in no time.

WHEN SPACE IS EXTREMELY limited, popping outside to grab a home grown eggplant or a few sprigs of rosemary may seem like an extravagance you don't have room to pursue. But nothing could be further from the truth! With just a bit of space and the right conditions, you can create your very own backyard–to–table reality with edibles grown in raised beds, in ground beds and even containers. Many tasty treats don't need much space to flourish and prefer shallow soil. And you can always make way for climbers like tasty tomatoes.

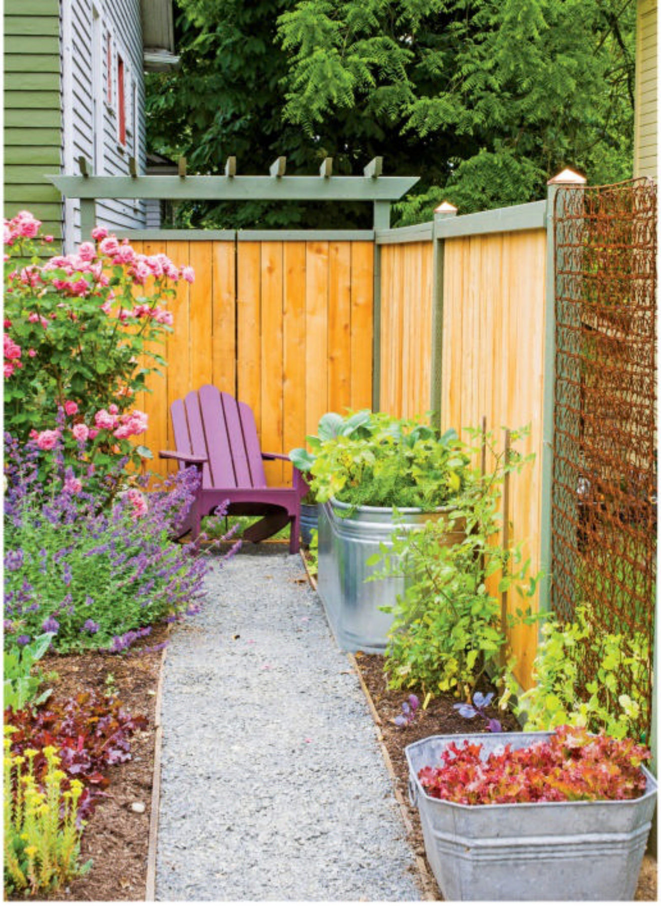
As with most gardens, when you're planting vegetables, the first thing to consider is placement. Many fruits and vegetables require full sun (that means at least six hours of sunlight a day) and plenty of water. If you live in a particularly hot spot, you'll need to provide some shade during the warmest part of those summer days. Proximity to a water source will also make things a lot easier on you, especially if you plant in a container or raised bed, as they dry out fast. Also keep in mind that vegetables generally prefer warm weather to cold, so make provisions if you get an unexpected blast of chilly weather.

Don't forget about the herbs! They bring as much to a garden as they do to a kitchen, thanks to gorgeous foliage, flowers and fragrance. Even better, if you truly have no outdoor space, they'll grow just fine in a pot on your windowsill. No matter where you plan to plant, do your homework, as the needs of herbs vary wildly. Rosemary is hardy in Zones 8 to 9, loves the sun and needs plenty of room to grow. Basil is only a perennial in Zones 10 and above and will grow in full or partial sun. And, if you're not careful, mint will take up every square inch of precious space. If you plan to pair plants up, make sure to group herbs that need the same things to survive and thrive. Once everything matures, use it! The more you pick, the more you'll generally get.

You should plant all your seeds at the same time. Once everything is in the ground or in a pot, expect to use an organic fertilizer once every three to four weeks during a growing season and take care to keep beds and containers free of weeds.

BED TIME

Whether you build your own raised bed or buy it online, position it in a sunny spot and fill with a generous amount of high quality, rich soil so roots have room to grow down and out. Give edibles a boost with a helping of an organic vegetable compost.



IN THE BAG

Even those with a zero lot line can help themselves to a generous helping of herbs. Hang vertical pockets on a fence, wall or gate and get ready for tasty treats such as thyme, oregano, basil, mint and sage.

……

PETALS IN THE METAL

Galvanized containers stand up to the elements and are fit for herbs and vegetables like beans, carrots and lettuces. Hint: Locate them in just the right spot before you add soil and it becomes too cumbersome to move the cucumbers.

……

Red Cabbage
Dwarf Pea Feltham First
Onion Sturon

TAG IT

Unless you're growing a single thing, even the smallest plot can benefit from some plant labels. Whether you craft tiny name tags out of tongue depressors or buy fancy versions, they'll help you keep track of what's what and act as placeholders in winter months to ensure that nothing gets disturbed before the magic happens.

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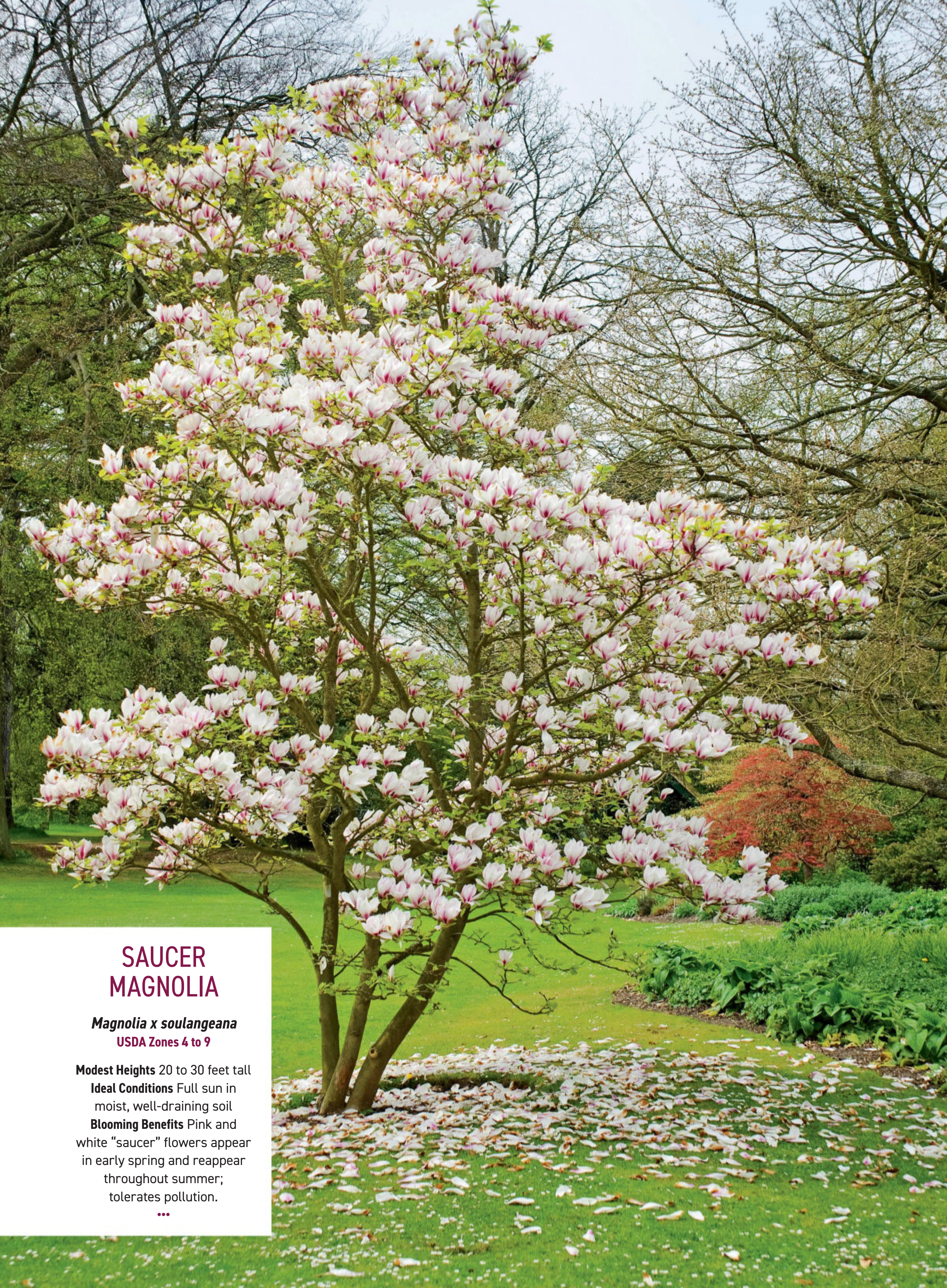


SAUCER MAGNOLIA

Magnolia x soulangeana
USDA Zones 4 to 9

Modest Heights 20 to 30 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Full sun in moist, well-draining soil
Blooming Benefits Pink and white "saucer" flowers appear in early spring and reappear throughout summer; tolerates pollution.

•••

GREAT *Lengths*

Achieve just-right heights with a beautiful array of smaller trees that will fit perfectly into a compact space.

IF NO ONE WOULD CONFUSE YOUR LITTLE NECK OF THE WOODS FOR MUIR WOODS, YOU'RE NOT ALONE. But even if your plot is more modest than massive, you can still enjoy the benefits that come with a statuesque tree—shade, lower electric bills and sometimes even an increase in property value. While a redwood or stately oak will probably take up way too much space in a small yard, there are an abundance of trees that will meet the tall order of adding volume without overcrowding. A word to the wise: Always do your homework and check variety names twice before clicking "add to cart." The last thing you want to find is that you've spent time and money planting a 50 foot spruce when you only have room for a much more diminutive 15 footer.

CREPE MYRTLE

Lagerstroemia indica
USDA Zones 7 to 9

Modest Heights 10 to 12 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Full sun in moist, well draining soils
Blooming Benefits Flowers from July through first frost; grows quickly—as much as 24 inches a year.

•••

BLOODGOOD JAPANESE MAPLE

Acer palmatum
USDA Zones 5 to 8

Modest Heights 15 to 25 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Full sun to part shade; can be grown in containers
Blooming Benefits Sports colorful foliage throughout the year.

•••

LEMON TREE

Citrus limon
USDA Zones 9 to 11

Modest Heights 10 to 20 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Full sun in well draining soil in large containers
Blooming Benefits Flowers appear in spring and fruit begins to develop in summer; can be picked when it turns yellow later in the year.

•••

DOGWOOD

Cornus florida
USDA Zones 5 to 9

Modest Heights 15 to 30 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Full sun to partial shade in well-draining soil
Blooming Benefits Blooms April to May; attracts birds and butteflies.

FRINGE

Chionanthus virginicus

USDA Zones 3 to 9

Modest Heights 12 to 20 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Full to partial sun
Blooming Benefits Works well in urban settings; tolerates drought conditions.

•••

JUDAS TREE

Cercis siliquastrum

USDA Zones 6 to 9

Modest Heights 15 to 25 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Full sun to part shade in well draining soil
Blooming Benefits Flowers appear in spring; seedpods in summer.

•••

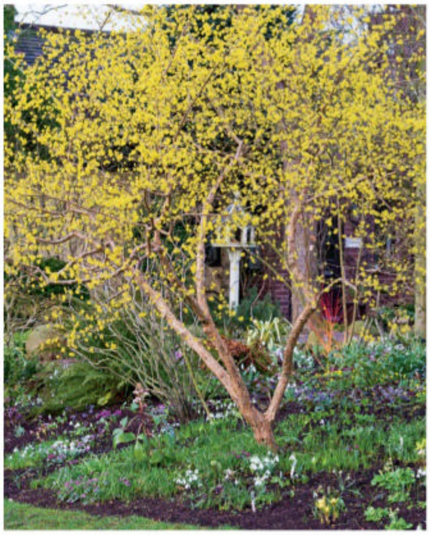
NORWAY MAPLE

Acer platanoides 'Globosum'

USDA Zones 3 to 7

Modest Heights 15 to 20 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Part shade to full sun in all kinds of soils
Blooming Benefits Flowers bloom in spring; can handle tough conditions.

•••



CORNELIAN CHERRY

Cornus mas

USDA Zones 5 to 8

Modest Heights 15 to 25 feet tall
Ideal Conditions Full sun to part shade in organically rich soil
Blooming Benefits Yellow flowers appear in March; great as a screen.

•••

Lay Down Roots

Try these planting tips to make sure that your family's trees last a lifetime.

- **DIAL BEFORE DIGGING IN** Call 811 before shoveling deeper than 12 inches to make sure that you don't accidentally hit any underground utilities.
- **DAMPEN THAT SPIRIT** Make sure that you keep a tree's roots damp before planting, and always lift the tree by the rootball.
- **DIG A $5 HOLE** Go two to three times wider than the diameter of the root ball so that trees have room to grow and deep enough that the trunk flare sits slightly above ground level.
- **FILL 'ER UP** Backfill with soil and tamp to eradicate air pockets.
- **MOVE IN THE MULCH** Allow for a 2-inch space between the trunk and the compost, which can be laid 2 inches thick.

SOCIAL *Climbers*

Whether it's the elegance of English ivy or the bold color of flowering clematis, there's no better way to add verve than with a vine.

WHEN GROUND SPACE IS AT A minimum, and you can't find one more spot for a single pot, sometimes the only way you can add to your garden is by going up! That's where climbers come in. These twining plants pair with supports ranging from mailboxes and flagpoles to pergolas, fences, arbors and more.

Choosing the right vine takes a little know-how. When you're dealing with a more compact area, going with a grapevine, say, might be a bit challenging, seeing as it could grow up to 50 feet long. Sure, you could spend most of your free time staying on top of it and trimming it down to size, but if you choose a smaller-scale option—something that only grows up to 12 feet or so—you can enjoy all the glory of upwardly mobile foliage and flowers with a little less hassle.

As with all plant shopping, do your homework. Check out what grows well in your area by visiting your local nursery. Ask questions and read labels to find out how much sunlight a plant needs and how big it's expected to grow. Decide if you're looking for a perennial, and then research what kinds of vines are hardy in your USDA Plant Hardiness Zone. You might also be fine with options that you can enjoy and then replace after a single season.

From there, you'll have to decide how you want to showcase it. Want to take on a trellis? Do you have a wall or a fence that could use a disguise? Maybe you want to start extra small with a decorative obelisk? You can even co-opt one of those containers and add a trellis. Or don't choose just one: Create a mix of objects covered in a single kind of trailing plant.

WEIGHT OF THE MATTER

Depending on the variety you choose and how often you prune and cut, the vine situation can get heavy over time. Make sure to find a structure made of materials that can manage the mass, such as a strong, rot resistant cedar or powder coated metal.

Make sure that there are at least 3 inches between your trellis and the outer wall of your home.

CLEMATIS

Hardy in Zones 4 to 8
Full to Partial Sun
Up to 6 Feet

While there are many types of varieties, 'Little Duckling' offers a lot of bang for your buck, flowering from May through October.

•••

MANDEVILLA

Hardy in Zones 9 to 11
Full Sun to Partial Shade
Up to 8 Feet

When you're looking for a combination of lush foliage and bright pink flowers in a full-sun spot, you can't go wrong with Mandevilla x amabilis 'Alice Dupont.'

•••

WISTERIA

Hardy in Zones 5 to 9
Full to Partial Sunlight
Up to 20 Feet

These somewhat high-maintenance plants can get long, but they can also be trained to drop downward. Once they mature, they will get heavy, so offer them strong support.

•••

ROSA EDEN ROSE

Hardy in Zones 5 to 9
Full Sun to Light Shade
Up to 10 Feet

Who can resist huge pink blooms made up of 70 delicate petals? They're also fragrant, easy to grow and care for, and very resistant to disease.

•••

BLACK-EYED SUSAN VINE

Hardy in Zones 9 to 10
Full Sun to Partial Shade
Up to 8 Feet

This tender perennial likes hot conditions—it actually has trouble in temps that drop below 60 degrees. It also makes for great ground cover.

•••

ANNUAL MORNING GLORY

Hardy in Zones 2 to 11
Full Sun
Up to 10 Feet

Although the 'Kniola Black' variety boasts some of the darkest flowers, it requires plenty of sunshine, as well as rich, well-draining soil, to shine.

•••

LITTLE PLANTS WITH A *Big Yield*

Play with scale in your outdoor wonderland by bringing in some full-frontal foliage.

SMALL GARDENS DON'T HAVE TO PRODUCE SMALL harvests. Gardeners with tiny plots have a ton of options, including planting compact varieties of everyday (carrots) and exotic (bok choy) veggies; growing on trellises that stretch space sky-high (literally); and alternating plants so that something grows from the first robin sighting of spring until the first hard frost in autumn.

The trick is to choose wisely. Although you may love asparagus, one plant may grow six feet tall and produce only one edible spear. On the other hand, one compact zucchini plant can produce pounds of zukes (and you can fry up and eat the tasty blossoms, to the delight of friends and family). When choosing seeds or seedlings, look for ones that produce many blossoms at a time, like cucumbers, or those that grow continuously, like a mesclun mix. Also, plant vegetables that pack a triple punch like beets—you can eat their leaves, stems and roots.

If you're working a small outdoor plot, dig down six to 12 inches and top with another six inches of compost, which allows you to sow seeds closer together and increase your harvest. If you're planting in containers, scoop up extras at the end of summer when big-box stores are practically giving them away—another way to boost your yield next spring.

TOMATOES

It doesn't get any juicier.

A staple of salads, soups and sauces, tomatoes are an edible gardening favorite that deliver pounds of juicy produce per plant. For small spaces, select "determinate" tomato plants that grow high, not wide like indeterminate plants. Try 'Patio Choice Yellow,' a cherry tomato variety, and 'Siberian,' which is known for robust flavor.

•••

LETTUCE

The essence of summery salads.

Lettuce is a cool-weather crop that grows best in the spring and fall. Plant it in any old container you can find, like an old wheelbarrow. Mesclun is a cash crop—it's much less expensive to grow it than buy it in the store. Sprinkle seeds on the soil, press down and water. In a couple of weeks, you'll see sprouts. Snip the tops for a daily salad, or space out the seedlings, which will grow into heads.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

If you're looking to get some good eatin' out of your small space, think of your favorite fruits and veggies, and grow exactly those!

TURNIPS

Turnips—really? Yup, turnips.

The great thing about turnips is that you can eat the tops as soon as the plants germinate, or let turnips grow and then eat the bulb later in the season. Turnips are best planted in late summer and harvested before the first frost. The younger the plant, the sweeter and more tender it will be.

•••

All in Good Taste

Do yourself a "flavor" by planting a sampling of these beautiful and delicious herbs to take your recipes up a notch or two.

Save yourself a step and plant herbs in containers from the very start. That way, you can easily move them indoors once temperatures begin to drop in the fall—most herbs grow very well inside. Bonus: They'll be that much closer to the kitchen when you want to add them to your favorite flavorful dishes.

CHIVES

Zones 3 to 10

These tasty treats appreciate a lot of sun, rich potting soil and cooler temps.

•••

PARSLEY

Zones 4 to 9

Plant in full sun to partial shade, and you'll have sprigs aplenty by spring.

•••

CUCUMBERS

Nature's ode to crunchiness.

Bush cucumbers grow on space-saving, compact plants, with vines measuring 1-2 feet. You can train them to grow up a trellis, which saves space, too. Give plants a supplemental feeding of an organic fertilizer when they get big and start to run. Expect 6-8 inch cukes at harvest time.

•••

GREEN BUNCHING ONIONS

Just the right amount of tang.

These slender alliums don't produce bulbs, so you can sow seeds close together and grow bunches of green onions. You can snip the green tips, throw them into a salad and let the rest of the plant grow throughout the season. If you harvest them to get at the tender white roots, replace plants with more seeds so you'll have a continuous harvest.

•••

LEMON THYME

Zones 7 to 9

It's delish in sauces and soups, and its leaves are gorgeous and evergreen.

•••

ROSEMARY

Zones 7 to 10

Starting from seed? Sow indoors. This fragrant herb also needs lots of sun.

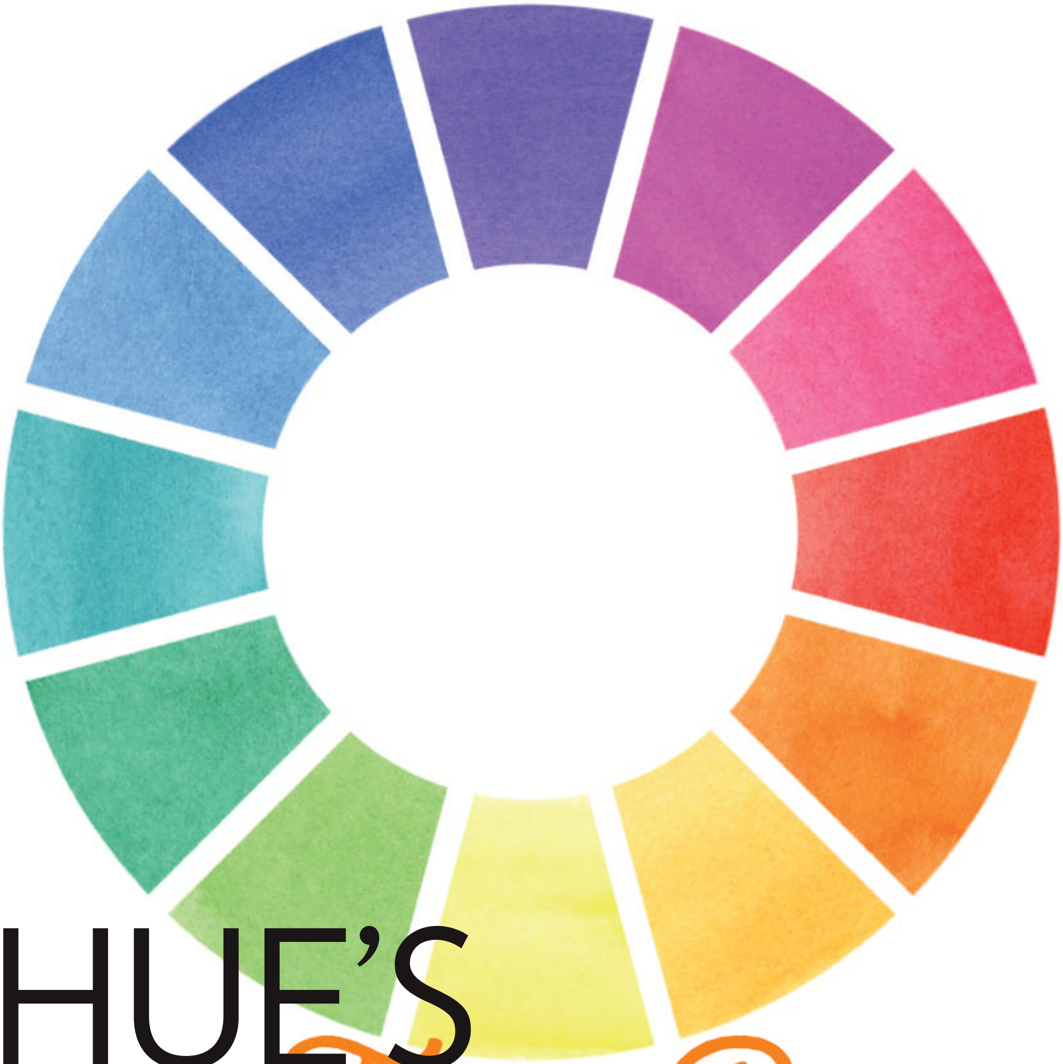
•••

SAGE

Zones 5 to 8

Sage is hardy to about 15 degrees, but when temps truly plummet, protect it!

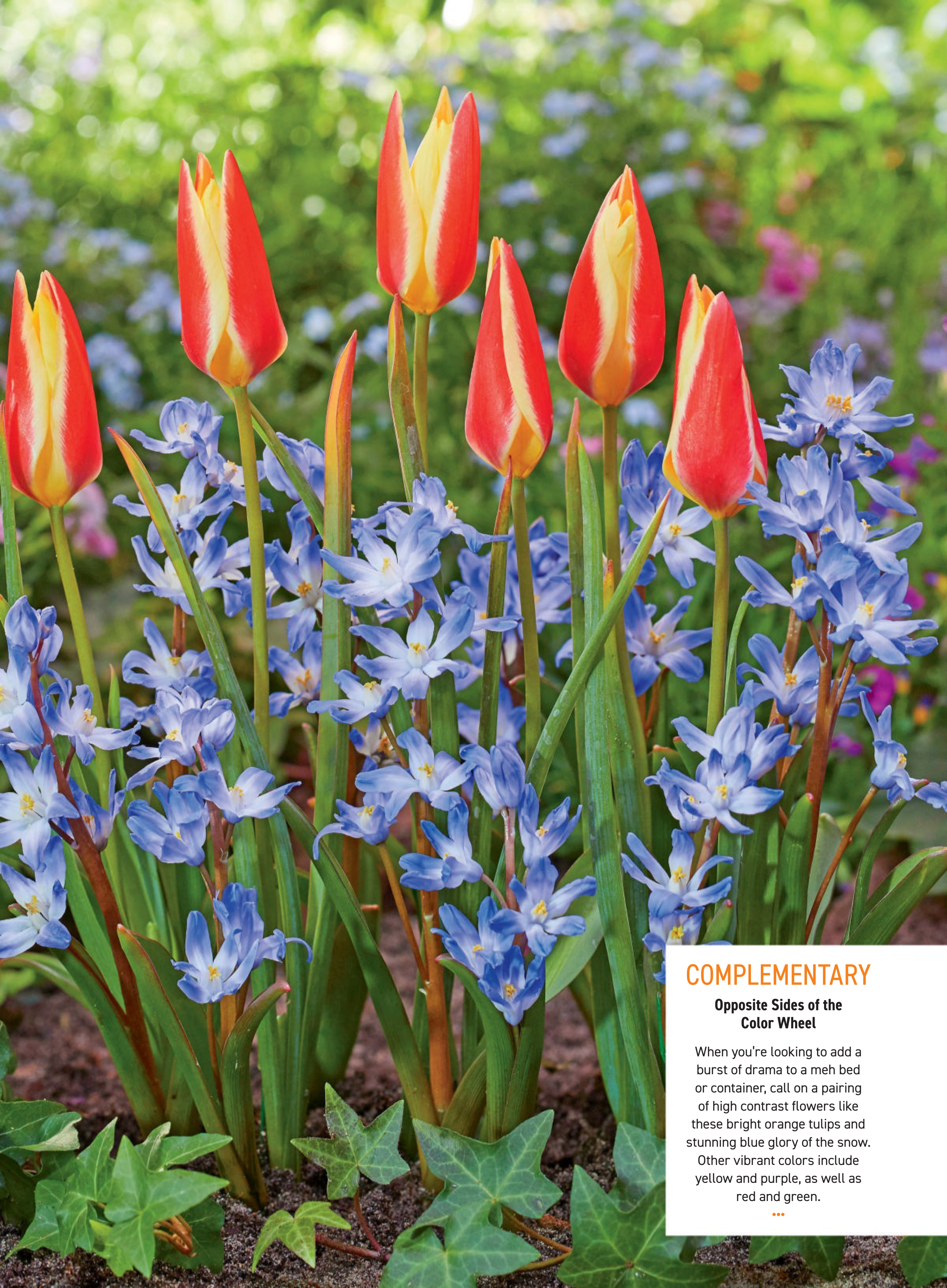
•••



HUE'S *The Boss*

Maximize your color options even
when space is limited.

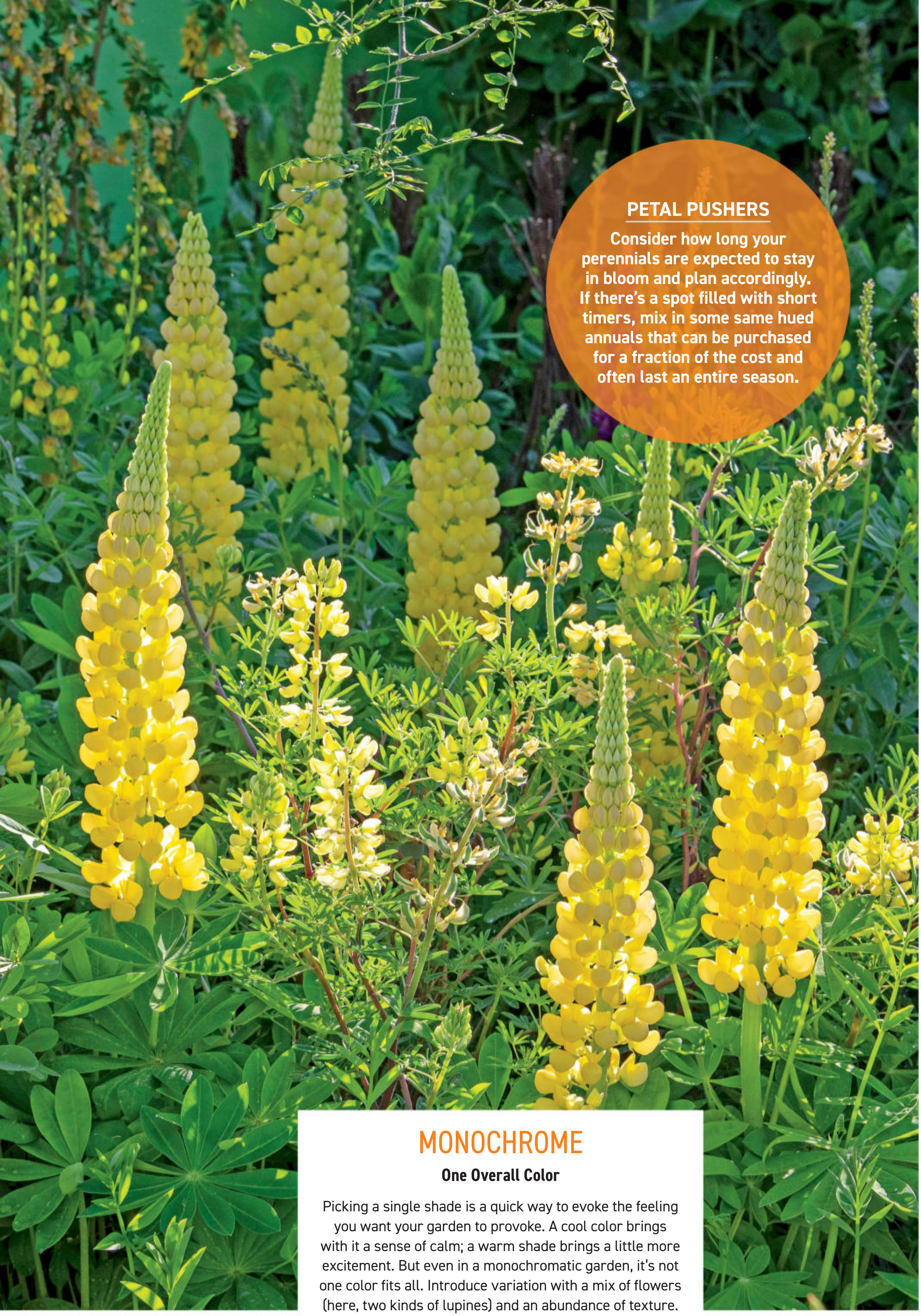
ONE OF THE MOST FUN PARTS OF PLANNING A GARDEN IS PICKING FLOWERS FOR beds and containers, and watching them all come together when everything is in bloom and working in concert. Before breaking dirt, many gardeners utilize a color wheel built around the primary colors—yellow, blue and red—to devise their design. Reds, yellows and oranges are considered warm colors, and they work well in tandem. Blues, greens and purples are cooler colors, and you can't go wrong grouping them together. But don't feel like you have to stay strictly warm or cool. You can pair colors that are directly across from one another on the wheel—yellow and purple, for example—for exciting color combos. You can also stick with a single hue: A monochromatic palette works exceptionally well in a small space because there's power in numbers, and a uniform palette can really pack a punch. But these are merely suggestions. If you find you can't possibly live without featuring every color in the rainbow, that's fine, too. After all, a garden is very personal, and if you love your blend, then that's the right one for you.



COMPLEMENTARY

Opposite Sides of the Color Wheel

When you're looking to add a burst of drama to a meh bed or container, call on a pairing of high contrast flowers like these bright orange tulips and stunning blue glory of the snow. Other vibrant colors include yellow and purple, as well as red and green.



PETAL PUSHERS

Consider how long your perennials are expected to stay in bloom and plan accordingly. If there's a spot filled with short timers, mix in some same hued annuals that can be purchased for a fraction of the cost and often last an entire season.

MONOCHROME

One Overall Color

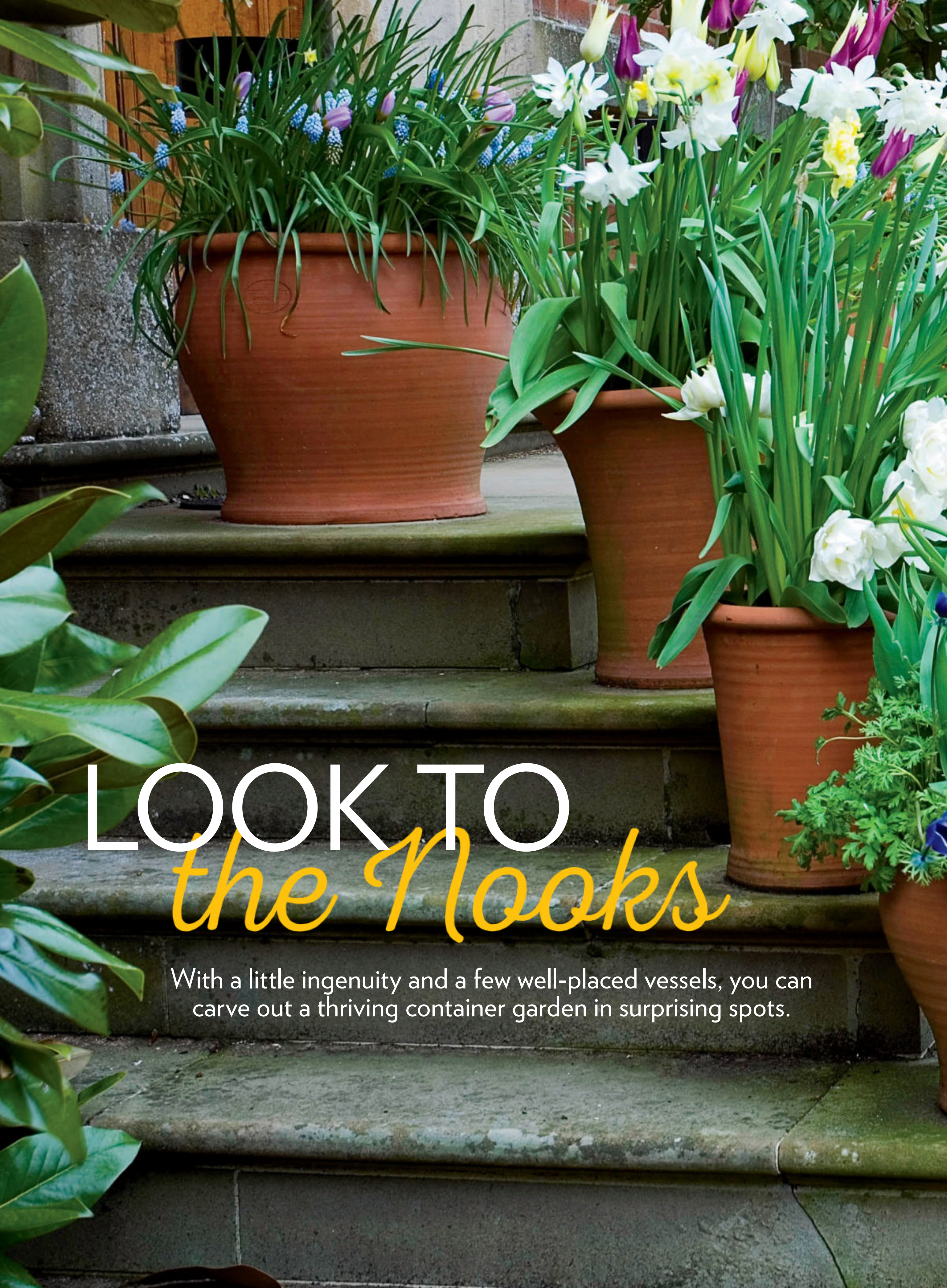
Picking a single shade is a quick way to evoke the feeling you want your garden to provoke. A cool color brings with it a sense of calm; a warm shade brings a little more excitement. But even in a monochromatic garden, it's not one color fits all. Introduce variation with a mix of flowers (here, two kinds of lupines) and an abundance of texture.

•••

ANALOGOUS

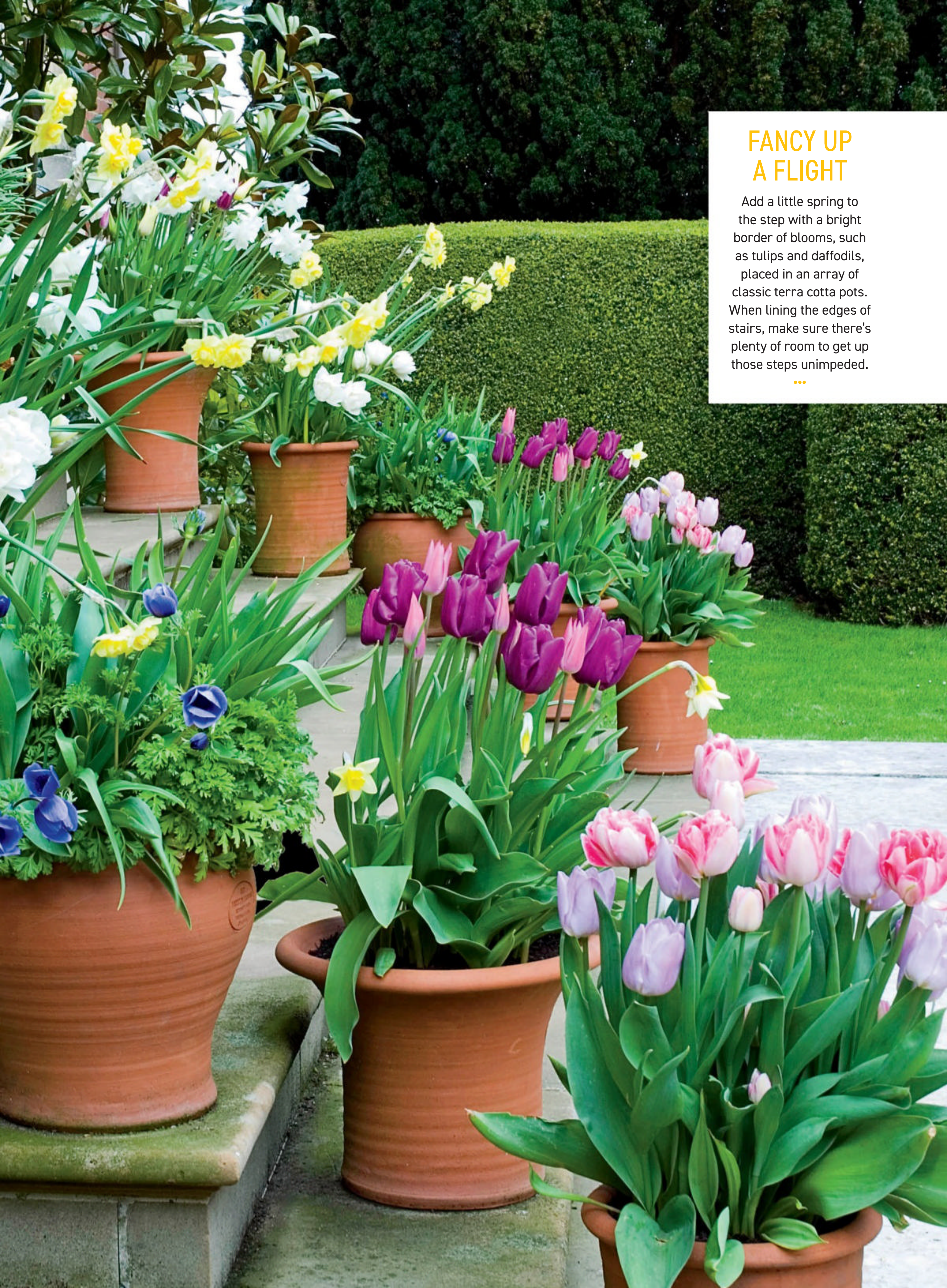
Colors Near Each Other on the Wheel

When you're looking to add a little harmony to a hardscape or bed, bring in a trio or duo of colors that works well together, such as this mixed border of violets and tulips. But remember: Looks aren't everything. Violets pair well with tulips because they bloom at the same time, require little upkeep and offer cover when tulips' leaves start looking a little less than pristine.



LOOK TO *the Nooks*

With a little ingenuity and a few well-placed vessels, you can carve out a thriving container garden in surprising spots.



FANCY UP A FLIGHT

Add a little spring to the step with a bright border of blooms, such as tulips and daffodils, placed in an array of classic terra cotta pots. When lining the edges of stairs, make sure there's plenty of room to get up those steps unimpeded.

PLAY MUSICAL CHAIRS

When space is at a premium, furnishings that can do double duty are a must. Vintage chairs are the perfect perch for potted plants, but when it's time to entertain, they can take the floor so that visitors may take a seat.

ENERGIZE THE ENTRY

While stone and tiled entries are unquestionably elegant, they don't leave much room for lush hedges. That problem is easily remedied by scooting in some stately containers filled with topiary box balls.

…

BY HOOK OR BY CROOK

No matter how refined or rugged your home's exterior, it can always benefit from the addition of some fresh details. When there's no room down below, string up a store bought pot or repurposed colanders such as these, filled with various salad greens and herbs.

…

GO OUT ON A LEDGE

Even when the only free square footage available is a windowsill, that's plenty. Light weight, galvanized containers packed with carex, impatiens, bacopa and fountain grass will make a big impression without breaking the beam.

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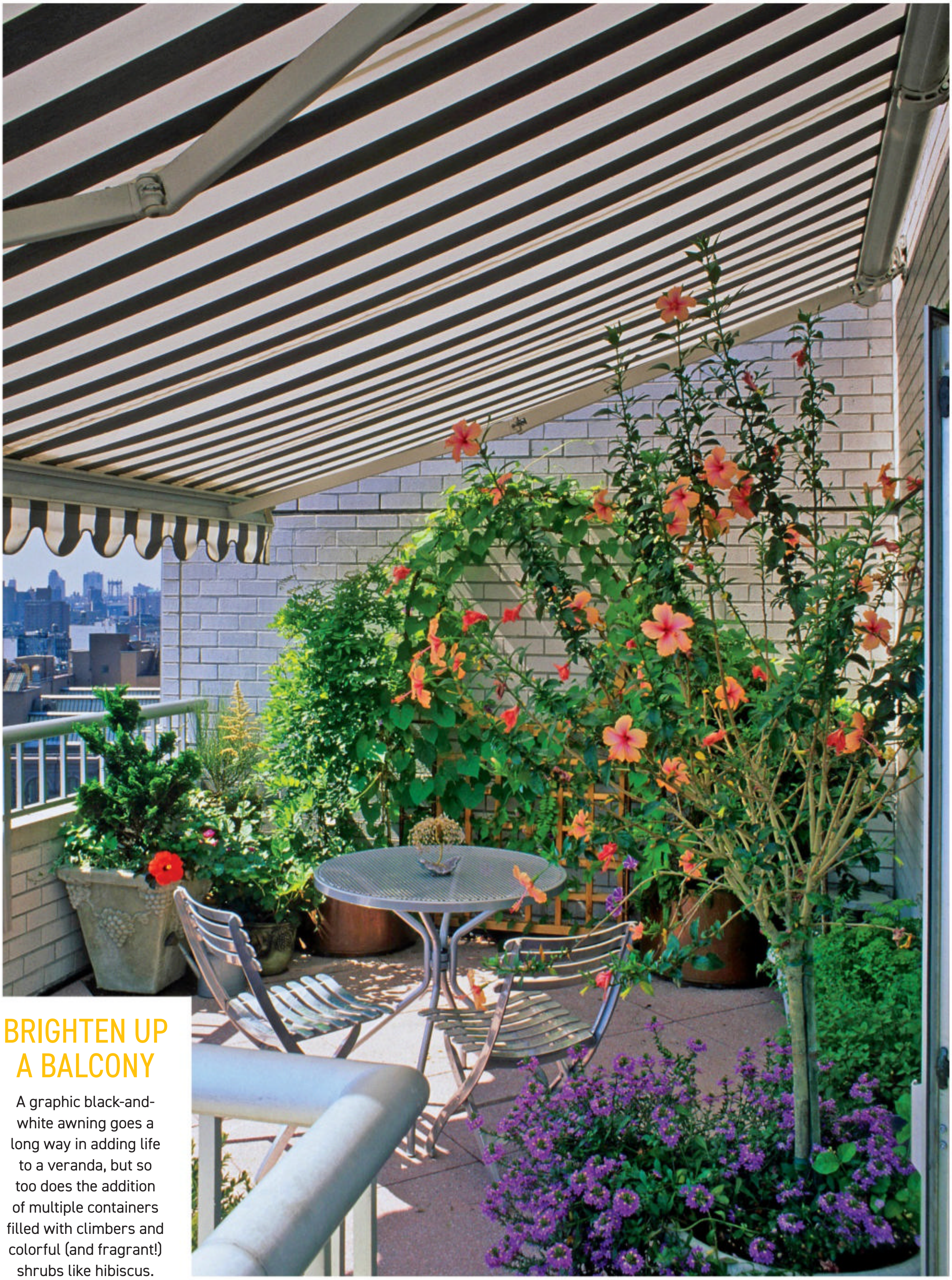
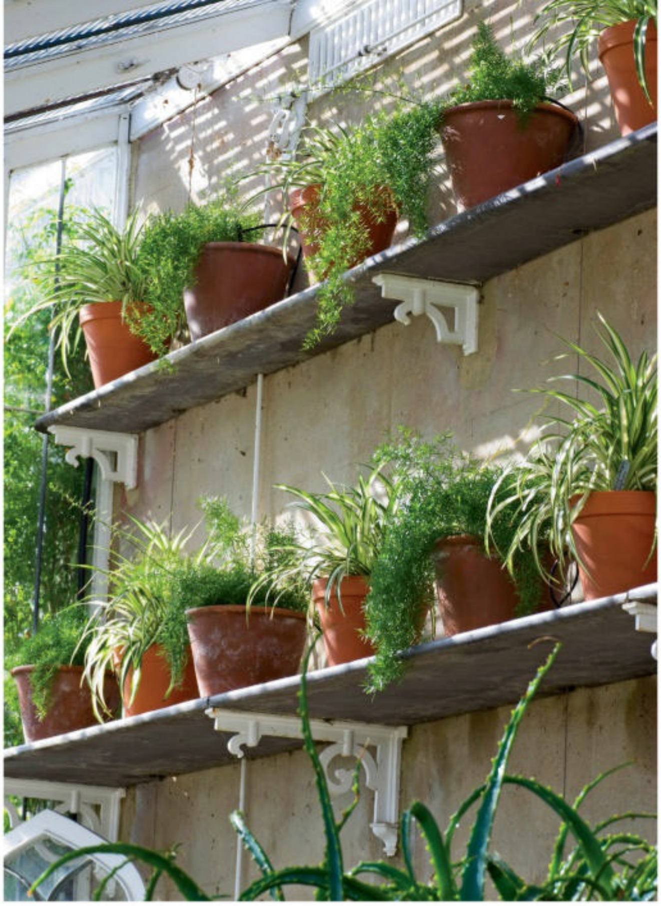


BRIGHTEN UP A BALCONY

A graphic black-and-white awning goes a long way in adding life to a veranda, but so too does the addition of multiple containers filled with climbers and colorful (and fragrant!) shrubs like hibiscus.

ENLIVEN A LANAI

If your outdoor space is limited to a mini mezzanine, take heart, window boxes are also tailor made for balcony railings. (Just make sure banisters can handle the weight.) Slim benches offer a cozy respite for both people and pots.



EXTEND SHELF LIFE

Make the most of wide open wall space with the addition of shelving crafted from outdoor friendly materials like bamboo, cedar or metal and then pile on the pots. Bracket firmly so shelves can handle the weight of pots, plants, water and soil.

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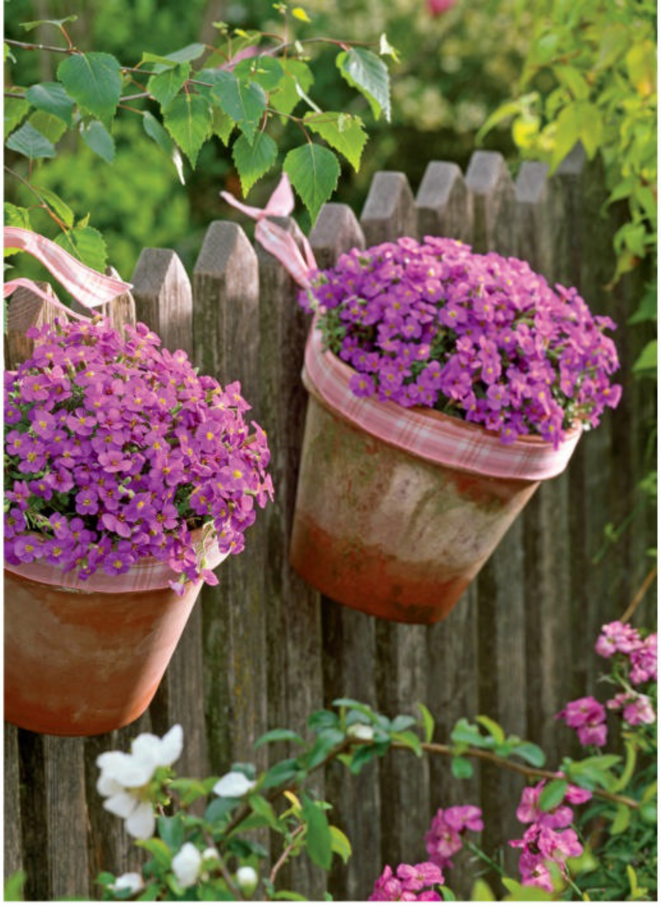
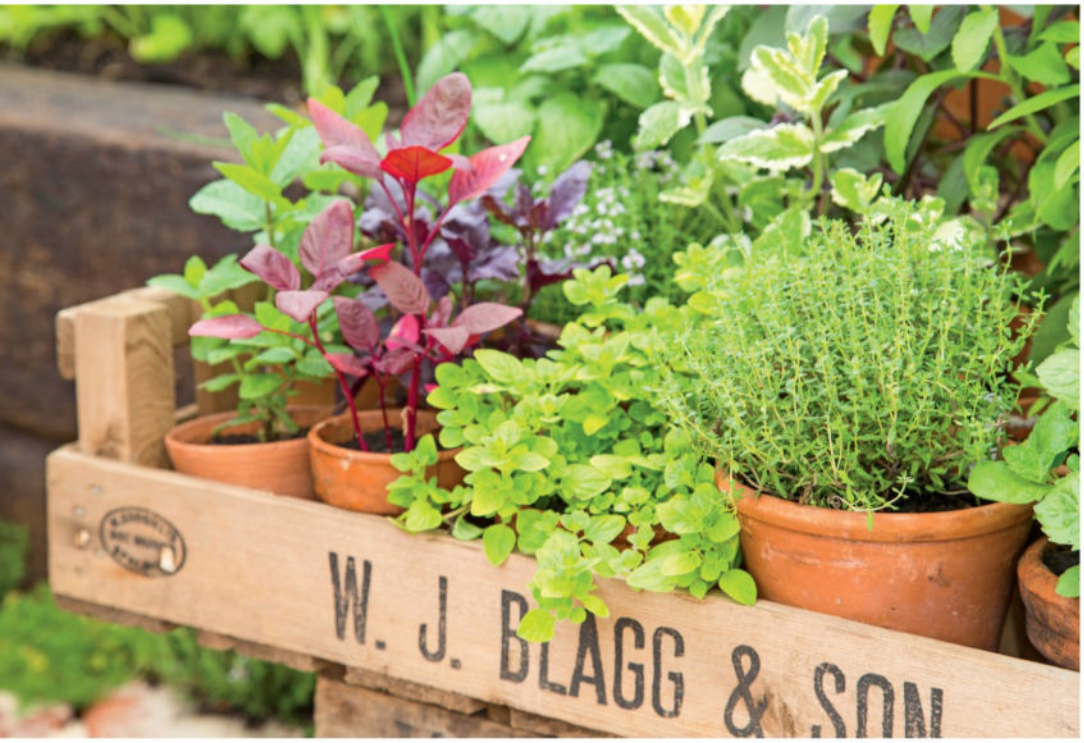


RIDE THE FENCE

Decorate a so-so gate with a pair of DIY hanging planters. Well-aged terra cotta pots outfitted with cheerful—and strong—ribbon and bright *Aubrieta* 'Hamburger Stadtpark' make for a well-scaled welcome.

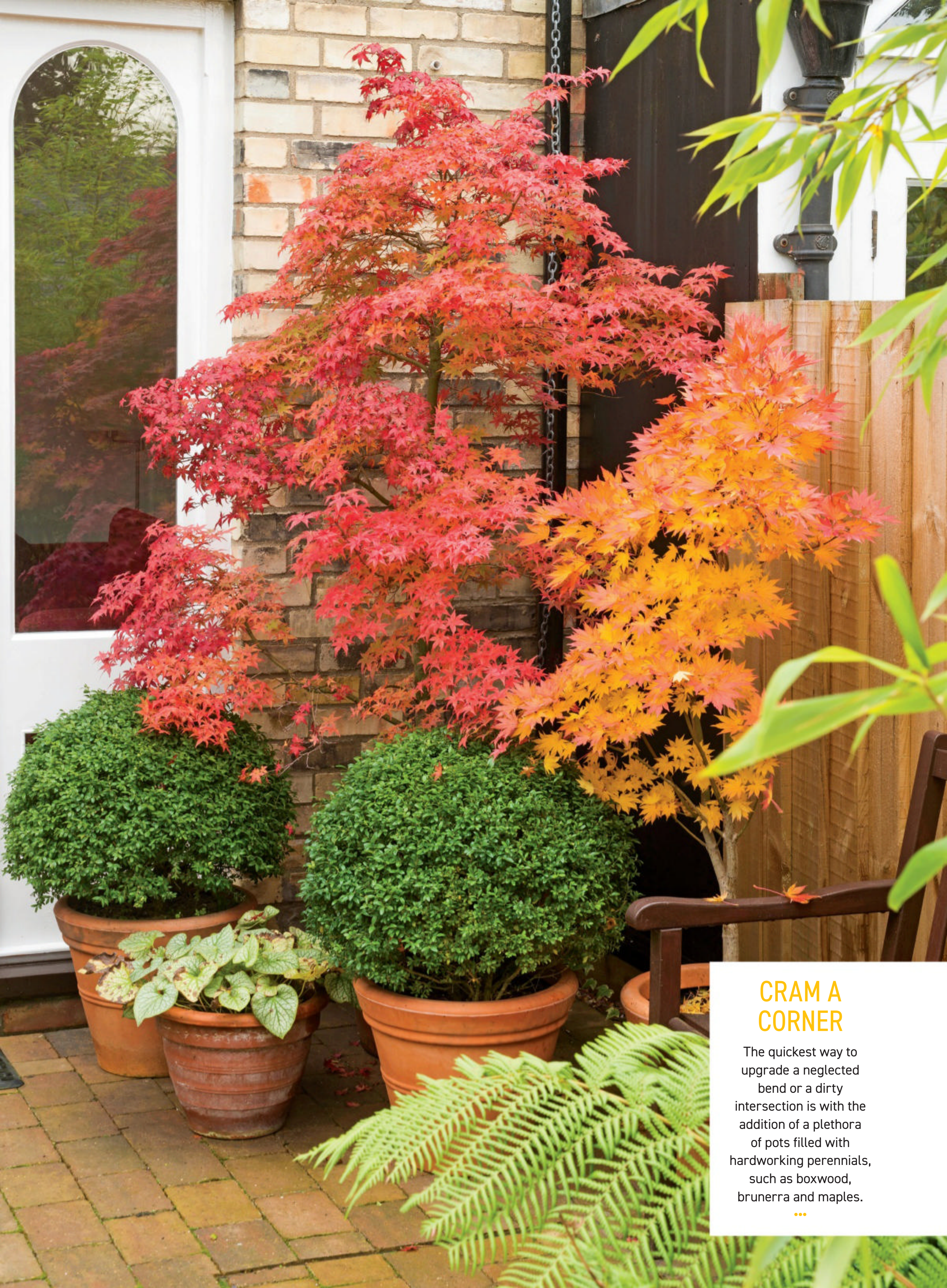
* * *



CONTAIN IT (TIMES TWO)

While some prefer to plant directly in vintage crates, it's smarter to place a bunch of potted herbs inside the palette. You'll get all the charm of a vintage coffer, but separate containers ensure you'll have more control over each and every edible. And even better, transporting a variety of vessels all at once is made easy.

* * *

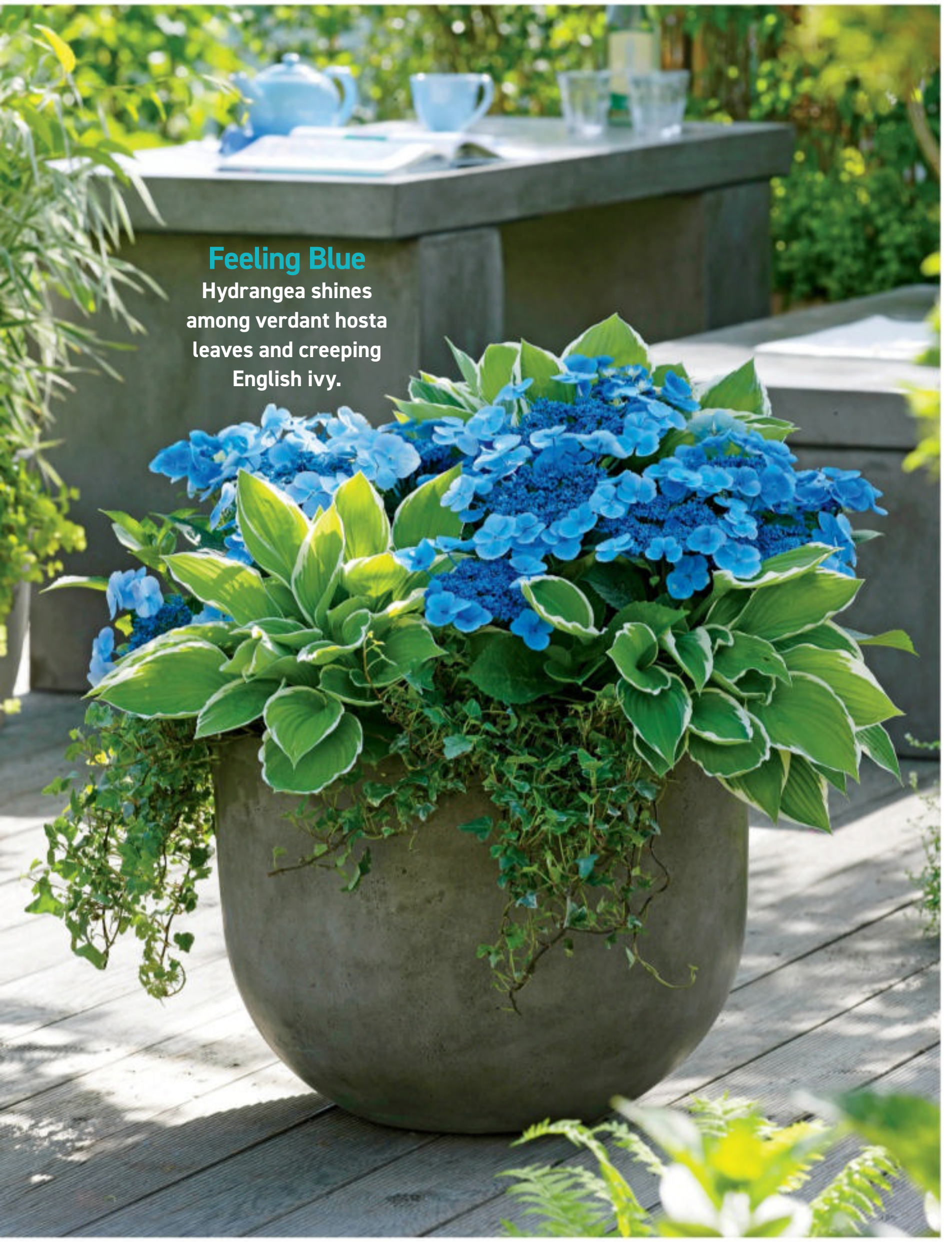


CRAM A CORNER

The quickest way to upgrade a neglected bend or a dirty intersection is with the addition of a plethora of pots filled with hardworking perennials, such as boxwood, brunerra and maples.

THE Right Mix

Maximize every inch of your vessels by planting an array of stars and supporting players via the time-honored thriller, spiller, filler container combo.



Feeling Blue
Hydrangea shines among verdant hosta leaves and creeping English ivy.

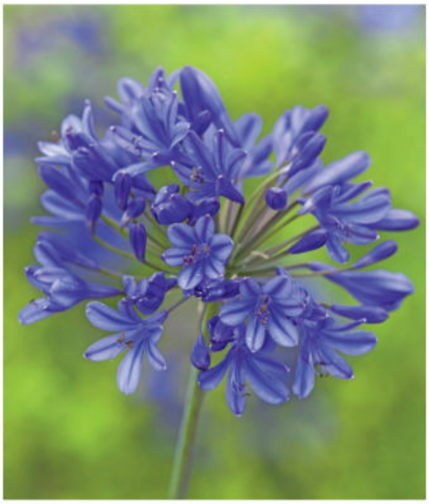
THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID for keeping things simple. A container brimming with a single type of foliage or flower can be both stylish and dramatic, depending on what type you pick. But if you're looking for a sure fire way to bring some boldness to a container, mix things up by pairing plants that offer up different colors, textures and heights.

Coming up with just the right balance may take some planning—you want colors that are complementary but don't clash or fade into one another. It's also important to group plants together that have similar needs when it comes to water, sunlight and nutrients. Do your homework before you spend a bunch of time and money on a combo that doesn't work aesthetically or practically.

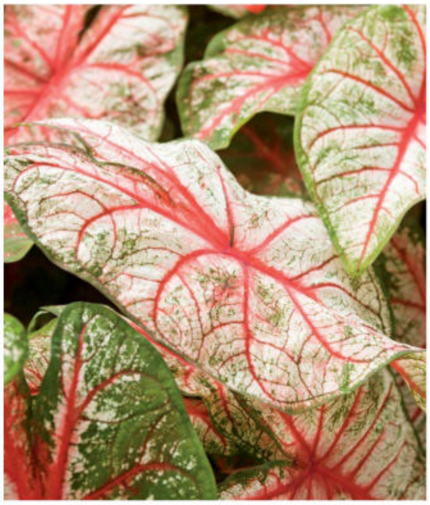
Feel free to freestyle, but there's an easy way to plan for a picture perfect pot: the tried and true combination of thriller, spiller, filler. As the name implies, the "thriller" is generally No. 1 on the call sheet—the star of the show. It could be a plant that's tall and boasts bold, colorful blooms or large and lush foliage, but it's something that catches your eye right away. "Fillers" are there to, well, fill in. They're shorter than the thriller and cover a lot of ground within the container with lush, finely textured leaves in pretty colors. They're there to complement the thriller rather than compete. "Spillers," such as creeping Jenny or sweet potato vine, add dimension by cascading over the sides of the pot. But, like practically everything when it comes to gardening, there are no absolutes here. Depending on the container and the overall effect of what you're trying to achieve, one person's filler is another's thriller.

There's also no "right" way to place the different elements. Take a gander at your container and try to figure out what you're trying to emphasize—or what you're trying to hide. The thriller can be placed near the back with a filler in front and spillers cascading from the right and left. The thriller can be off to the right with the filler on the opposite left, with a spiller falling from the front or back. Depending on if you mainly go with annuals or perennials, you can mix up your arrangements as the seasons change.

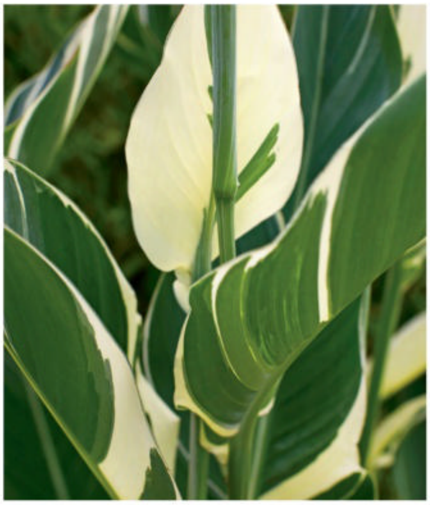
THRILLERS



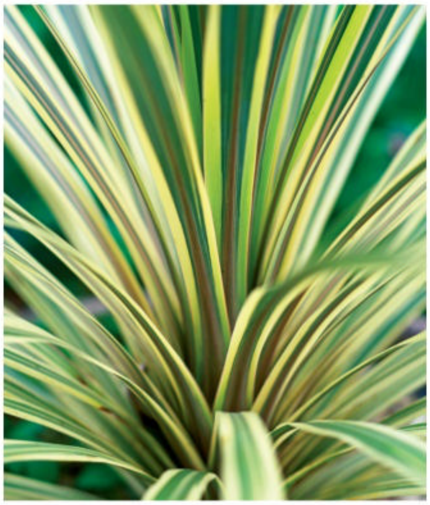
Agapanthus



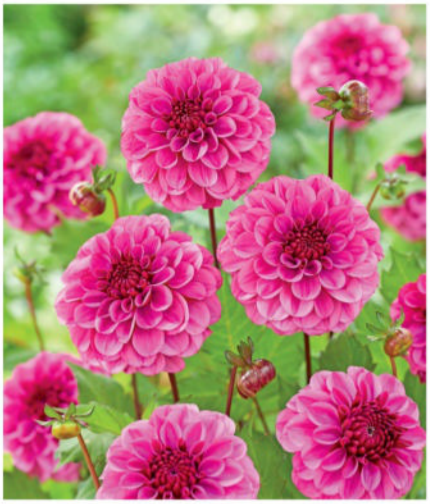
Caladium



Canna



Cordyline



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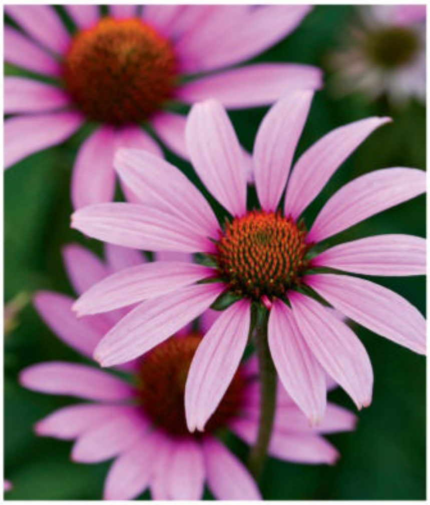

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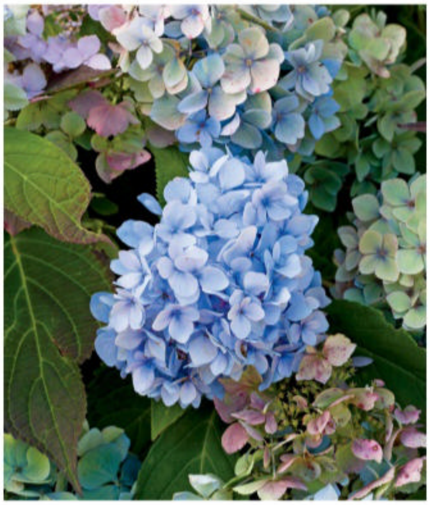

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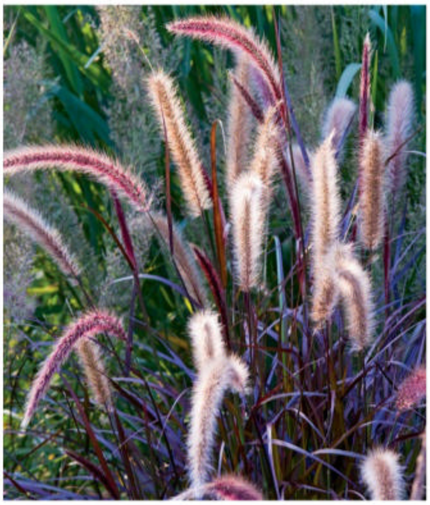

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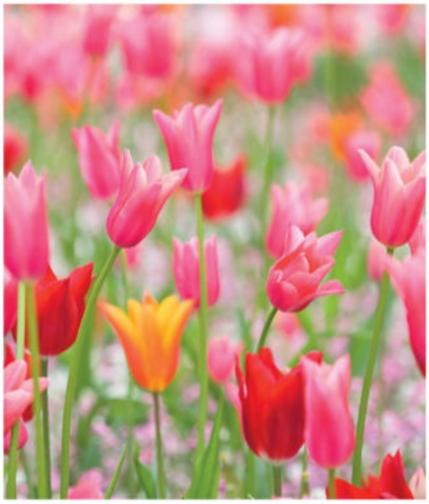
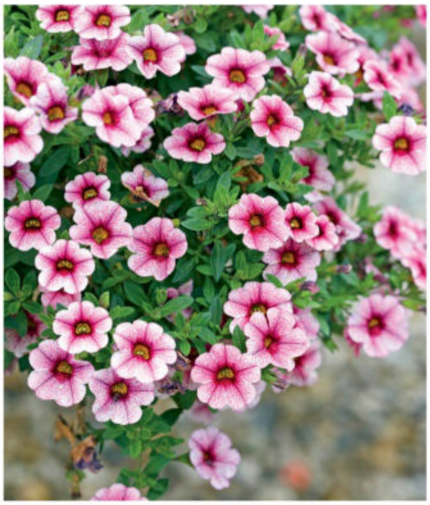
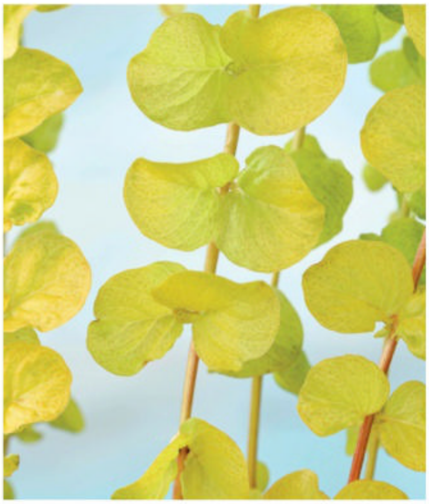


Tulip

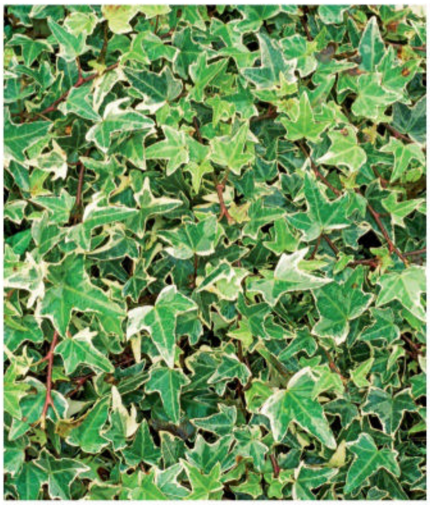
SPILLERS



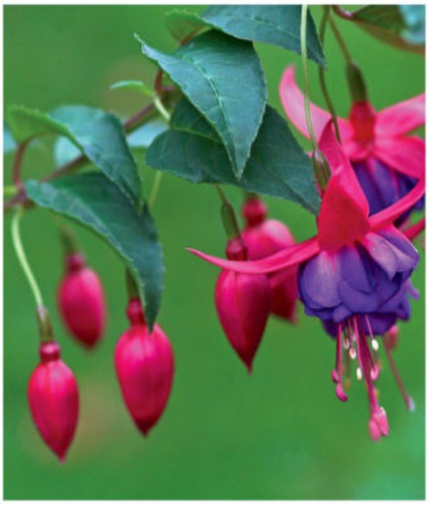
Trailing Petunia



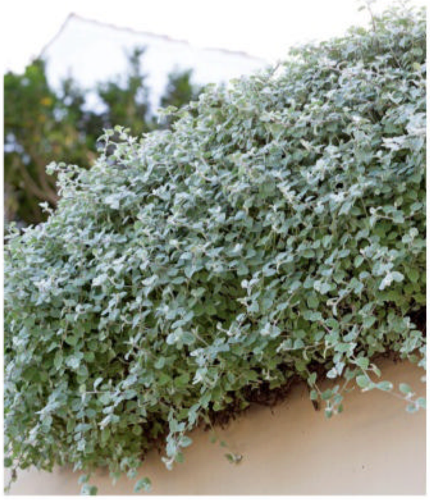
Creeping Jenny



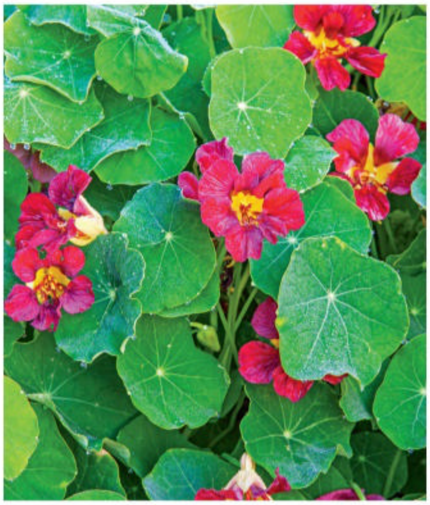
English Ivy



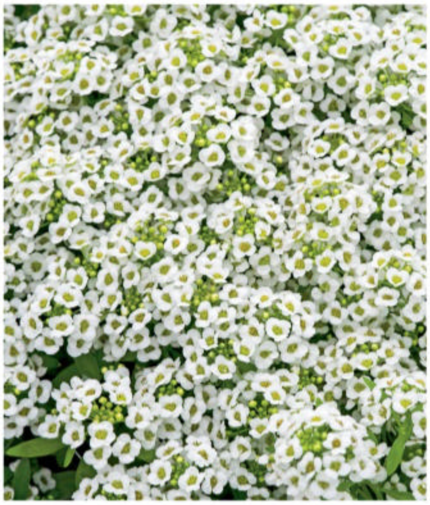
Fuchsia



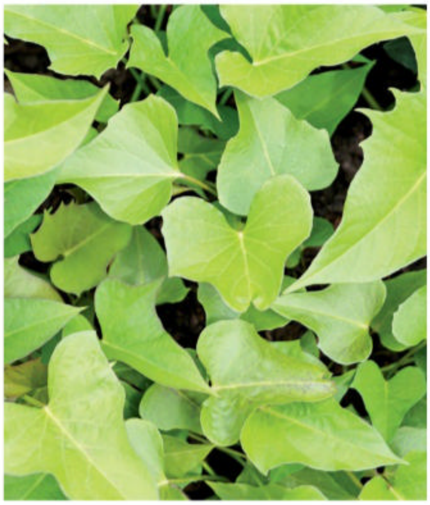
Licorice Plant



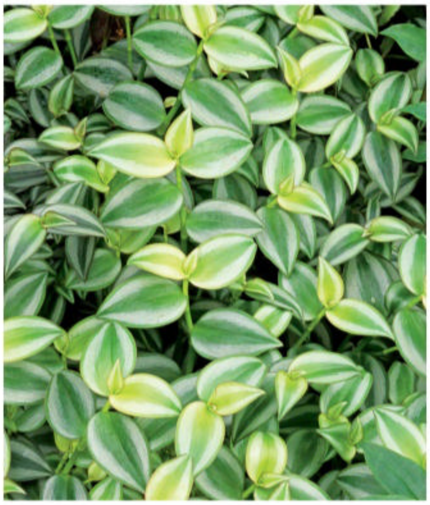
Nasturtium



Sweet Alyssum

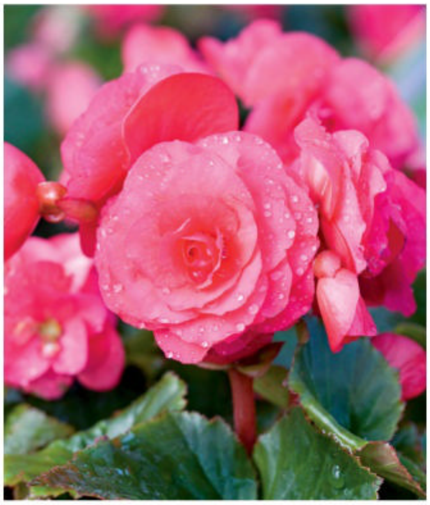


Sweet Potato Vine

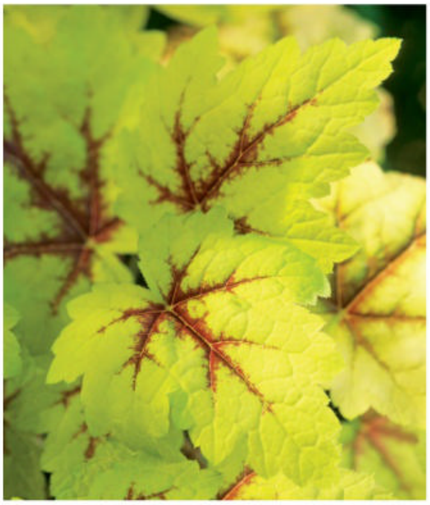


Tradescantia

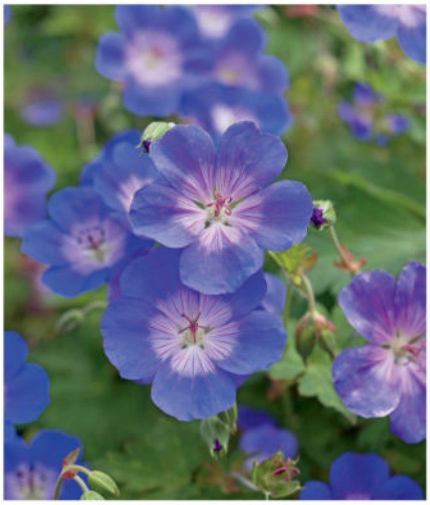
FILLERS



Begonia



Coral Bells



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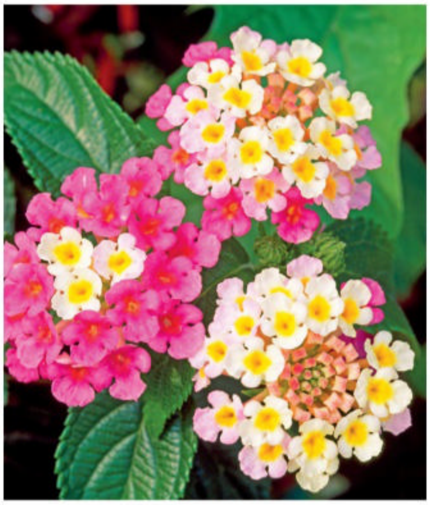
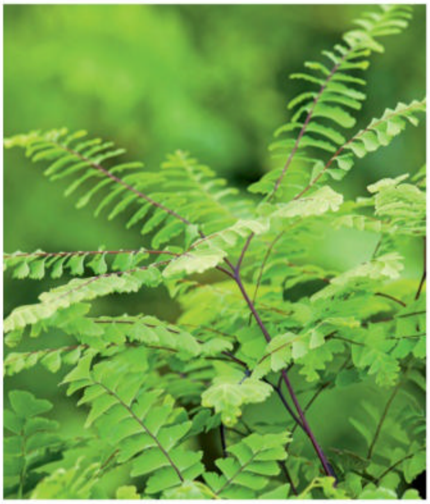
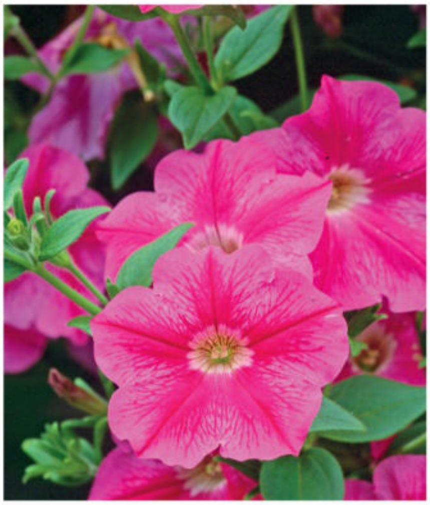


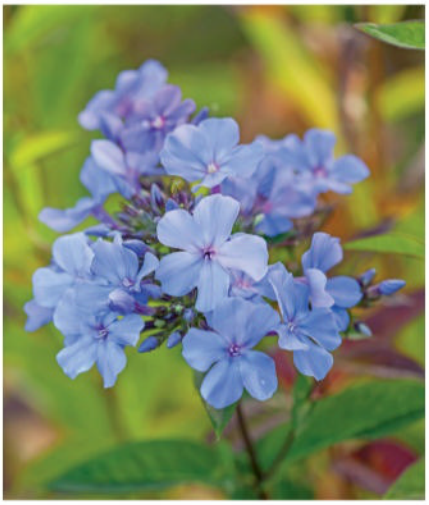
Lantana



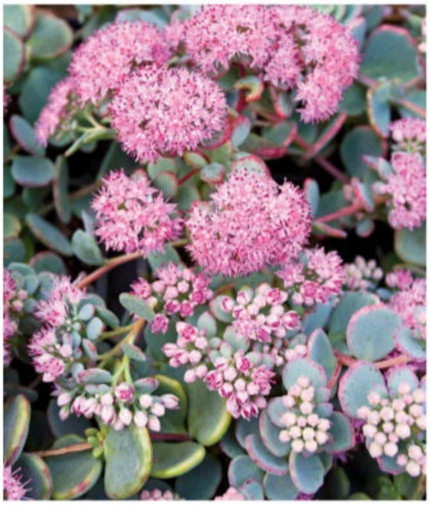
Maidenhair Fern



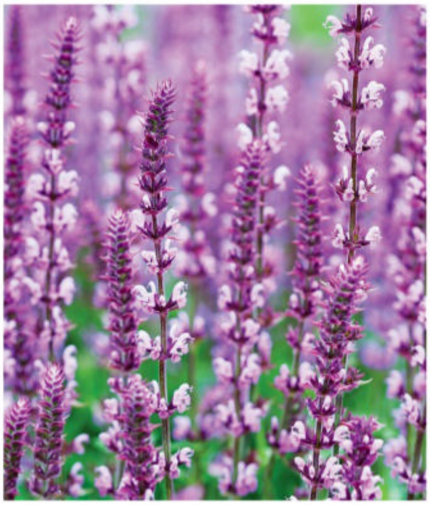
Petunia



Phlox



Sedum



Woodland Sage

Think Little

Take your cues from these clever homeowners, who are enjoying the greatest rewards in the least amount of space.

A Narrow ESCAPE

A garden designer got down to the business of creating a lush, over-the-top entertaining space on his not-so-large plot.

GROW & GO

Nic Howard first saw the Edwardian cottage in 2011. “I’d always wanted a walled garden,” he recalls. He extended into half of a double garage attached to the far, east-facing wall, to create an 8-by-20-foot garden “room.”

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IN THE ZONE

Kota blue limestone sets the stage for a rugged-yet-right-sized dining table and a set of mismatched chairs, as well as a logburning chiminea. “I had a low, bowl shaped firepit before but it was a trip hazard,” says Howard.

WHEN THE GATE SWINGS OPEN and shows off Nic Howard's Surrey, England, courtyard garden, there's a heightened sense of anticipation. Suddenly, a delightful outdoor living space is revealed, alive with beautiful plants and unique furnishings. "When you have a small garden, you have to make every [inch] count. I love that challenge," says Howard. The garden designer has taken on many demanding projects through the years, but he says he found his own project among the most difficult to figure out.

Although he is often drawn to more modern design, here, he says, "I decided on something more timeless." To that end, he has subtly mixed contemporary styling with fun surprises such as an old, weathered dining table and assorted chairs.

His design unfolds as a series of linked, eye catching vignettes that create lovely views when framed by the kitchen or sitting room windows. Grass was swapped out in favor of Kota blue limestone, which leaves more space for abundant, textural plantings. The shady spots sport a

BLADES OF GLORY

Too much of a hardscape isn't a great thing, so Howard suggests softening up stone pavers and wooden planks with plants like white, woolly lamb's ears and waves of golden Japanese forest grass. "I love its fountain effect along the edges."

NO SCRUB SHRUBS

In order to bring plenty of color to the garden throughout the year, Howard packed in spring- and summer-blooming hydrangea ('Limelight' shown here), and trees like red leaved Japanese acer that bring autumn color. "In a limited space, every plant has to earn its keep," he says.

SECOND HAND SCORES

Howard has found that vintage items are often well-scaled for tiny yards, and through the years, the landscape designer has added used furnishings, such as a pair of Adirondack-style loungers, which he hunts for at antiques and junking fairs.

subtle palette of greens and whites, while bright pops of color shine in sunnier spots.

When the landscape architect built the additional stretch of wall to enclose the courtyard, the resulting floor area was the shape of an irregular triangle. He replaced the crazy paving with limestone slabs, which he squared to the cottage. "You always want to set off a design from the most dominant feature—here, it's the cottage," he explains. As a result, the decking runs parallel to the cottage wall, meeting the garden room at an odd angle. Both the decking and the paving run diagonally to the long boundary wall. "So when you look from the garden room into the farthest rounded corner, you have a long sight line that gives an impression of greater length than the dimensions suggest, making the courtyard feel much larger overall," he says.

With the hard landscaping in place, Howard could disguise the irregular shape by planting deep borders adjacent to the long wall and curving section, where he brought in the climbing rose 'Blush Noisette.' At the farthest corner, where the walls do not meet at a right angle, he trained evergreen climbing plants. Painting the walls black has the effect of making the boundary disappear and creates contrast for the greenery.

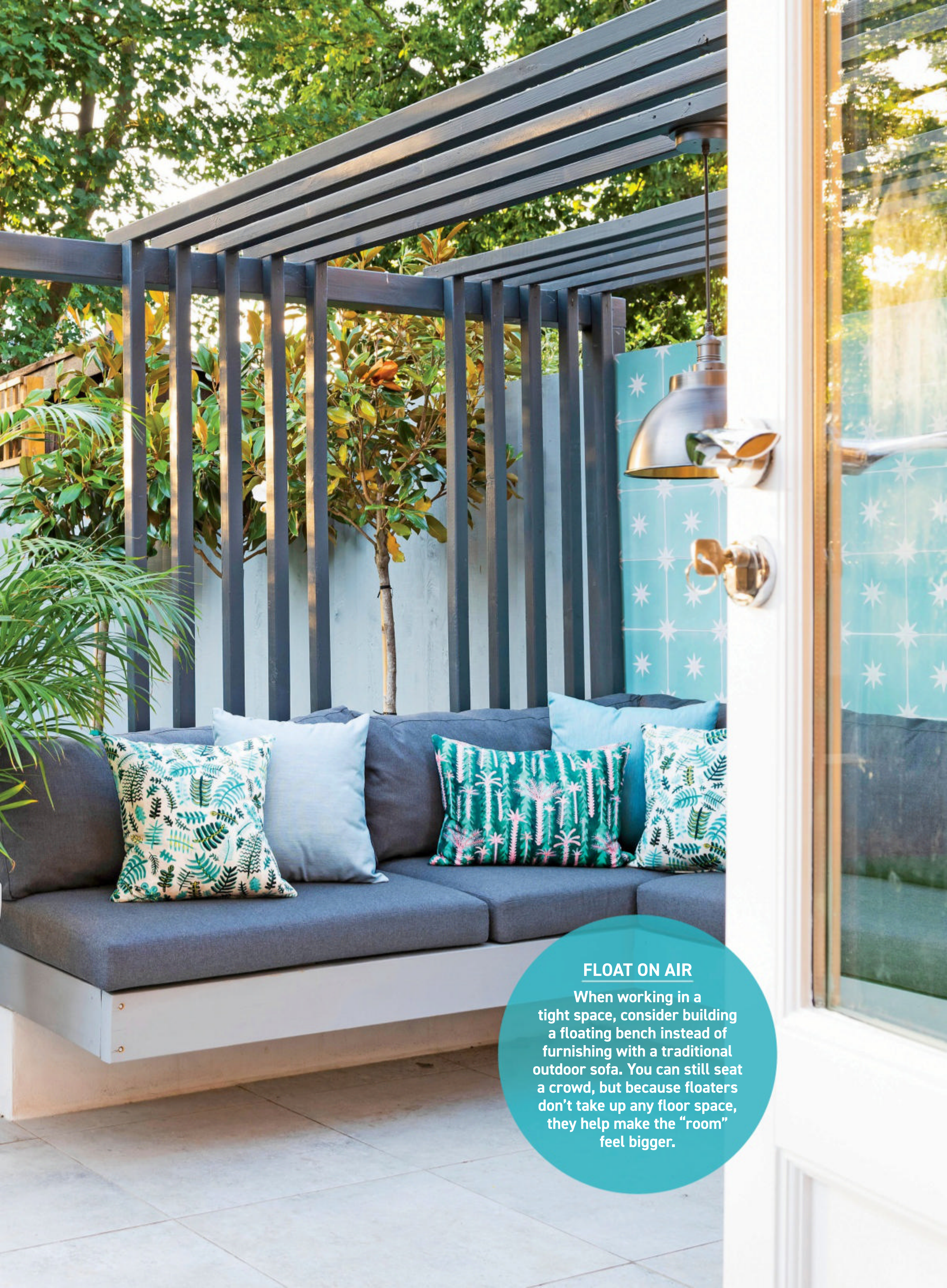
There is no doubting Howard's passion for plants—he's been in the gardening game since he was a child, thanks to his grandmother. "A perfect garden appears effortless, but it's no lucky accident. You have to attend to the smallest of details and, above all, cherish the plants," he explains. Among his many prized specimens are 'Garnet' penstemons, a dwarf purple verbena 'Lollipop' and a blue haze of lesser calamint 'Blue Cloud,' a magnet to bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Hydrangeas also work hard here, both 'Annabelle,' with its huge, greenish white flowerheads, and 'Limelight,' which fades to white and pink with age. At their feet stand shade loving, white Japanese anemones, offset against foliage of varying green hues and textures such as honey spurge, rodgersia and box.

Through the years, he has added furnishings like the Adirondack style loungers and retro, open wirework chairs, but he likes to keep things simple. "A few larger format pieces look much better that lots of small fiddley features," he says. He recently bought a steel, log burning chiminea from Aldi, which he fires up for company on cool nights.

Much like the flames from his fireplace, Howard's passion for his garden remains hot, too, mainly because he's always introducing new elements. "When your garden is tiny, you want to keep reinventing the space," he says.

Rooms With A VIEW

A family creates a cool and contemporary garden with a little something for everyone.



FLOAT ON AIR

When working in a tight space, consider building a floating bench instead of furnishing with a traditional outdoor sofa. You can still seat a crowd, but because floaters don't take up any floor space, they help make the "room" feel bigger.

PREP WITH PEP

Infuse a little play into your workspace with the addition of a bold tile backsplash. Choose from a variety of resilient materials like ceramic, porcelain and cement, and you shouldn't have to add a sealant. Installing in a sunny spot? Opt for lighter colors to avoid fading.

•••

LIGHT FANTASTIC

Adding stylish illumination to a space doesn't have to take up too much time, space or money. Look for well-scaled, well-priced pendant lights in a variety of styles at stores like Home Depot and Target or websites such as Wayfair and Overstock for as little as $70.

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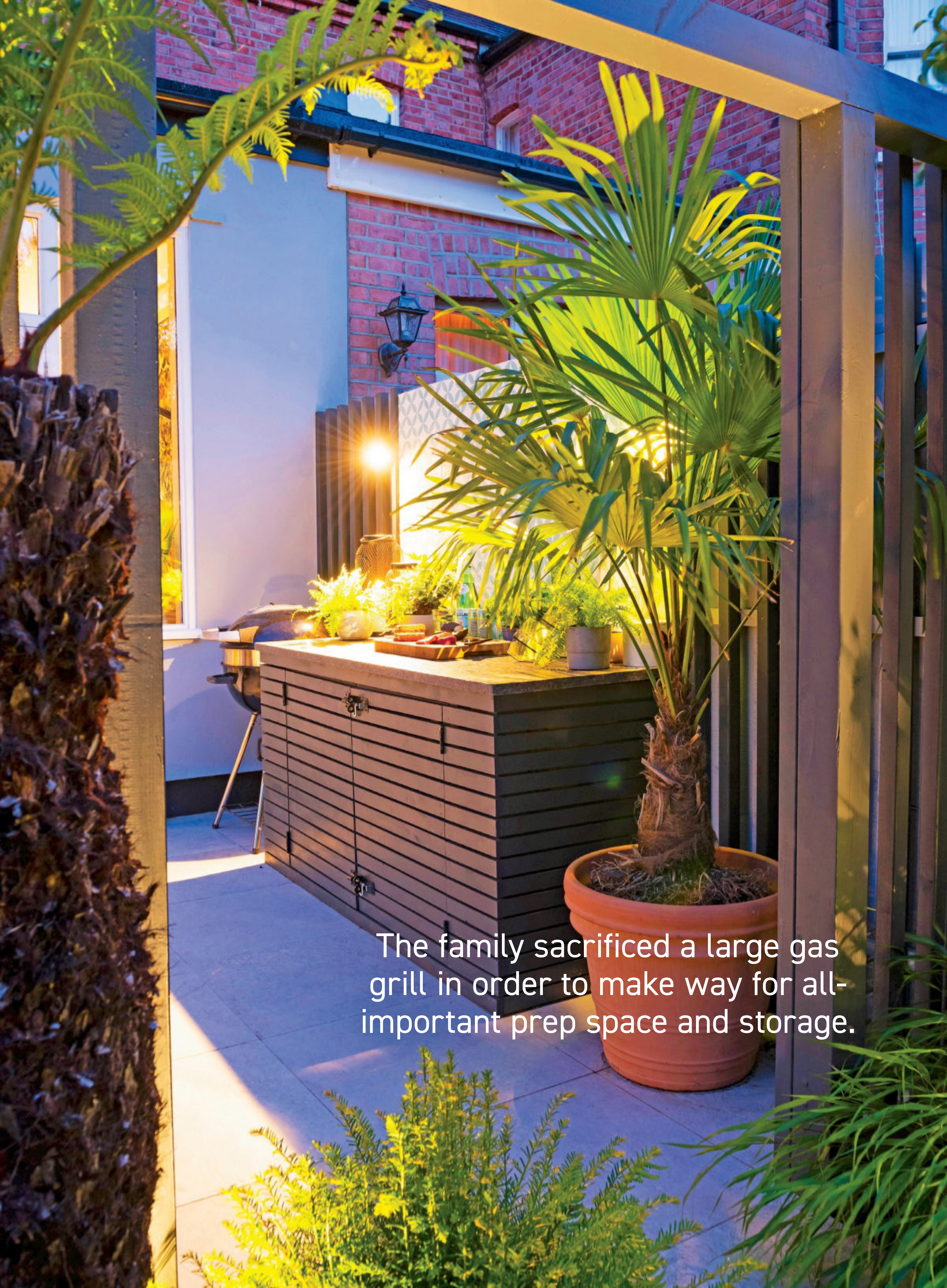
WHEN A COUPLE WITH THREE young daughters decided to redo their modest backyard, they had one big goal: Create a spot stylish enough for adults while also plenty playful for the kids. The busy family of five needed a designated area for entertaining friends and family of all ages, and they longed for a comfortable and attractive area for alfresco dining that could also accommodate just hanging out.

So with that in mind, the planning began. They made room to comfortably seat eight to 10 people without overwhelming the small backyard. The homeowners went back and forth as to whether to install a grill, but ultimately decided to go with a wheelable Webber model, which they placed on the left side of the garden. The shadier area is the perfect spot for the “outdoor kitchen,” which also includes prep space and storage.

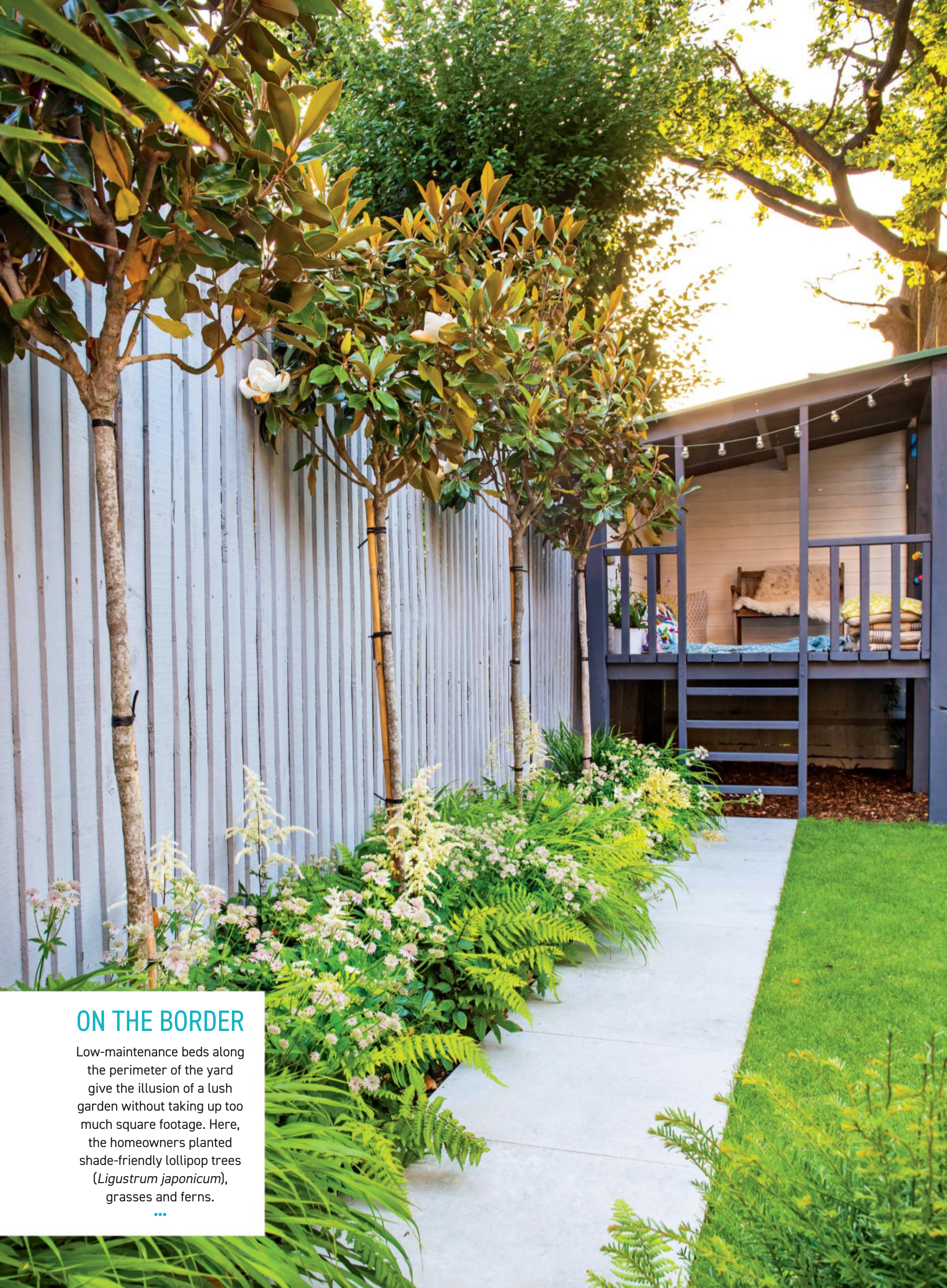
With those adult challenges met, it was time to take on one for the kids. The parents wanted to build a large play structure that would stand the test of time as their three girls grew up—something that wouldn't dominate the views from inside the house or overtake the entire garden. An architectural, bespoke pergola and screening of the first third of the garden turned out to be key to the solution. The color and materials used for the play structure also went a long way in adding some maturity to the kid-friendly spot.

The homeowners chose strong colors for the fencing and other timber structures in the garden, and complemented them with more subtle hues by way of tiling, plant choice and soft furnishings. The planting structure was created by featuring lollipop trees with an underplanting of colorful perennials. Lighting was key, and utilized tree uplights, a circuit of spike lights, practical wall lights for the kitchen area and a bespoke, powder coated pendant light. Good lighting means they can use the garden at all hours of the day, year round.

There are lots of fun elements in this design that give a real feeling of “outdoors in.” The homeowners sought to create a genuinely comfortable entertaining area with plush cushions, custom made for the deep, L-shaped seat. The pendant light picks up from the interior and, combined with the overhead structure, creates an inviting seating area, which encourages regular use. Having all these “rooms” allows the entire family to enjoy a relatively compact space without ever feeling like they're on top of one another. In fact, everyone is free to roam in what now feels like the great outdoors.



The family sacrificed a large gas grill in order to make way for all-important prep space and storage.



ON THE BORDER

Low-maintenance beds along the perimeter of the yard give the illusion of a lush garden without taking up too much square footage. Here, the homeowners planted shade-friendly lollipop trees (*Ligustrum japonicum*), grasses and ferns.

HAUTE HUES

Enjoy all the fun that comes with jungle gyms and playhouses without any obstruction or interruption to the calming vibe of the small space. Kids can climb, slide and swing in their very own spots but, thanks to the adult friendly palette, there's order in the courtyard.

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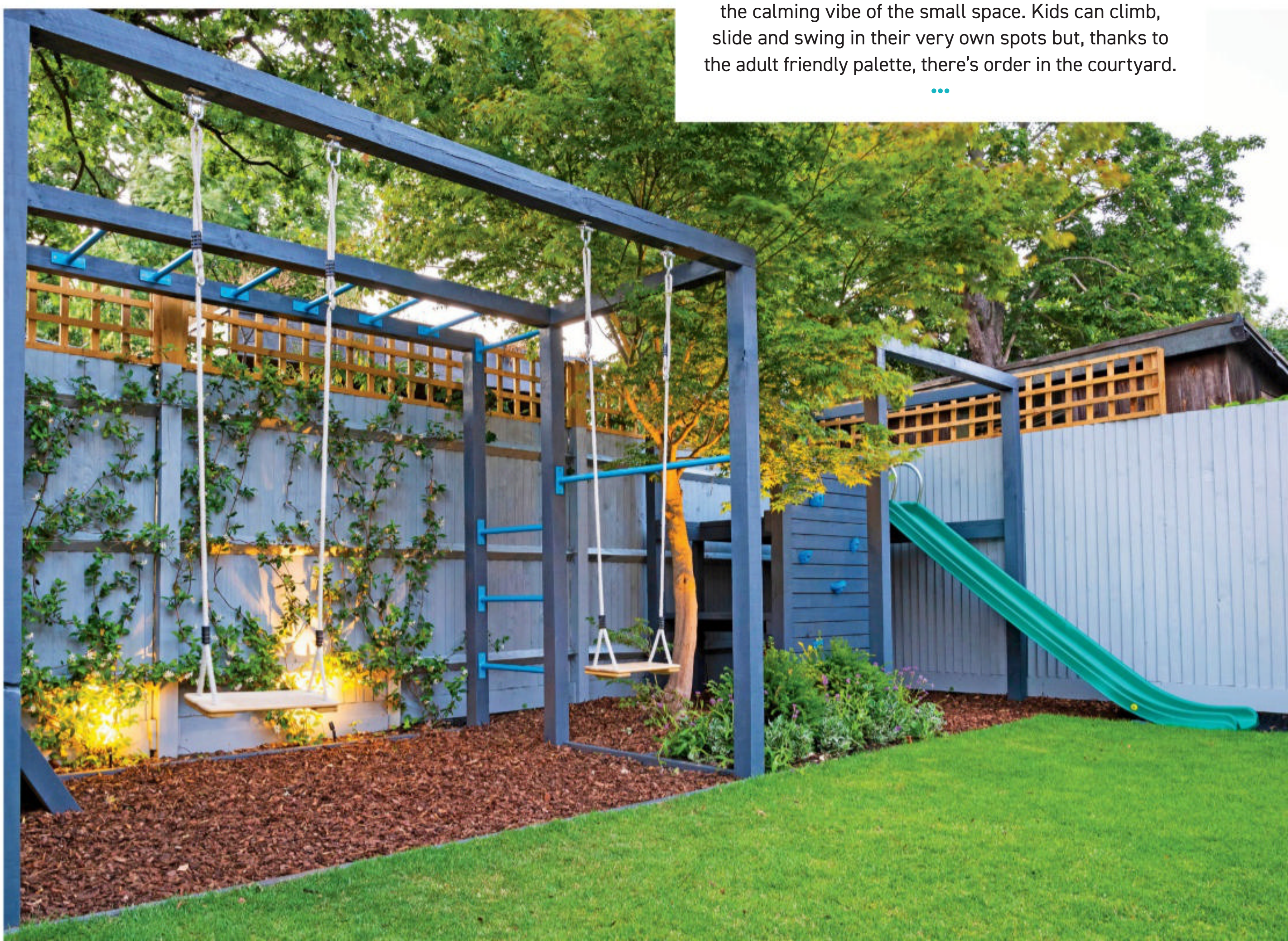


HAPPY FEET

When a large part of a small back yard is paved, it makes sense to give extra thought to what lies beneath—especially during hot summer months. Consider cool surfaces, like white travertine or a textured acrylic coating, which absorb less heat.

Sense & SENSIBILITY

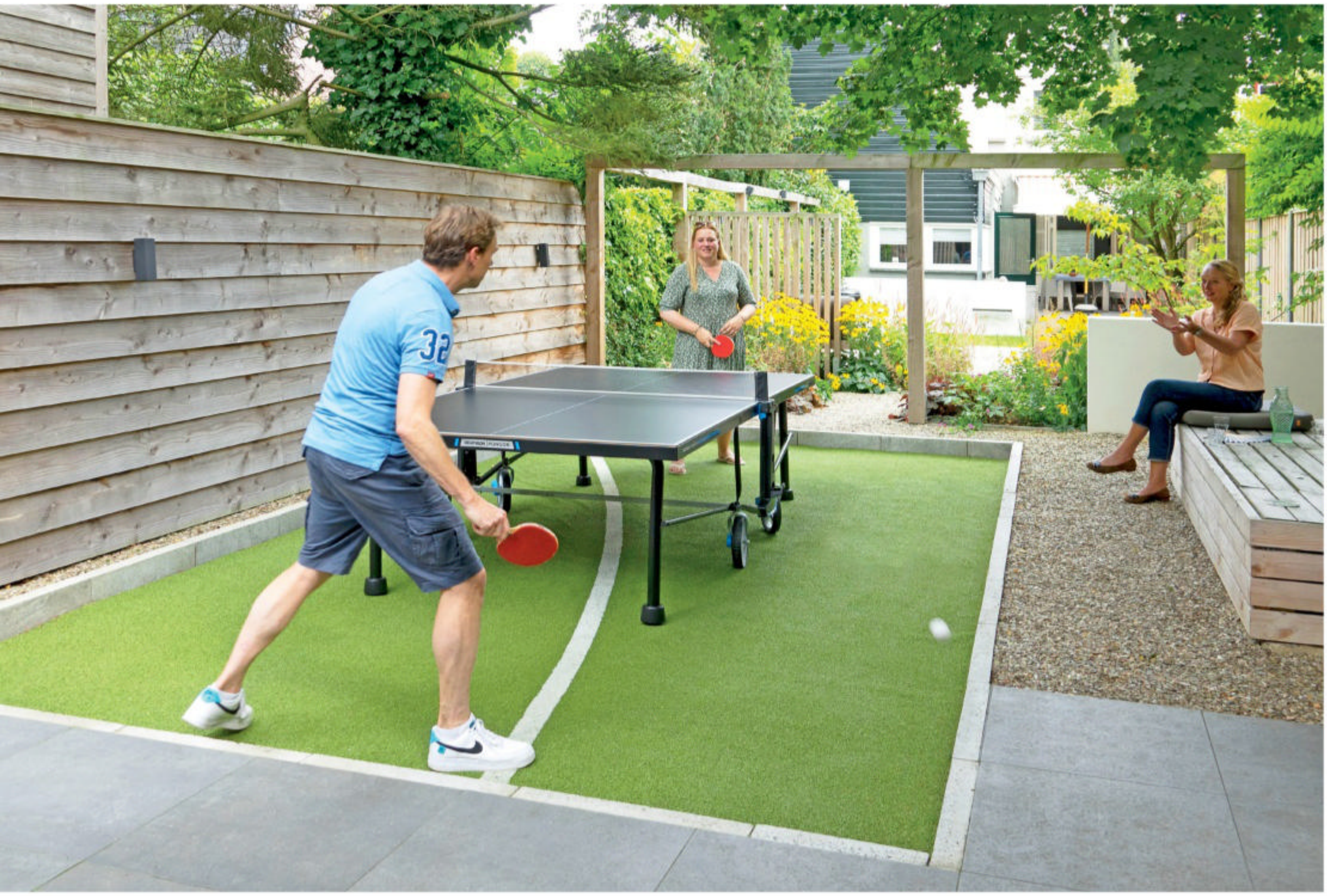
A family of four looks to a landscape designer to bring purpose to their overgrown, limited lot.

WHEN QUARTERS ARE TIGHT AND there are two teenagers in a household, every inch both indoors and out counts. So was the case for Loes and Ramon Min. As the kids became more active, their parents realized the small back yard was going to require a total redesign. At the time, the family was barely using even half of the yard, due to the overgrown trees and hedges. They needed someone who could see past the brush and make sense of the narrow lot.

Enter garden designer Danielle Hulsebos. When she first visited the small, neglected outdoor space in the southern Netherlands, she found an unruly plot. "The garden is long and narrow, and it was outdated. It had a huge conifer and a large hedge along the entire length at one side," she says. "Those things took up a lot of space. And then there was an old shed [that didn't even have] enough space to store the family's bikes inside. There was no lighting, so in the evening, it became this dark, atmosphere–less abyss."

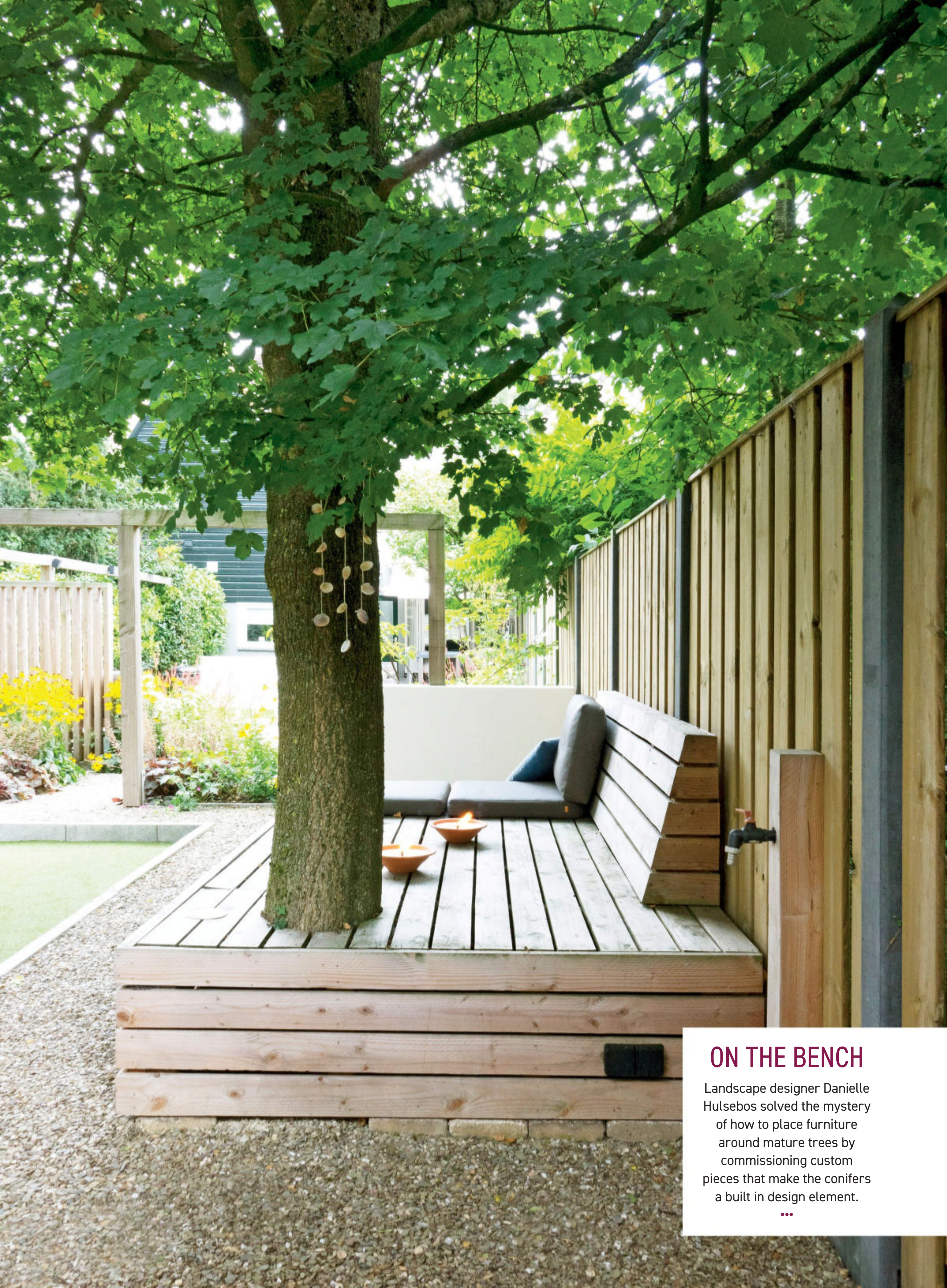
The garden designer also noted that the homeowners had become used to crowding into one small area. "The lawned terrace by the house was the only area they were using," says Hulsebos. The Mins were desperate to make more room for relaxing, entertaining friends, and playing games and sports. They also wanted a new garden "room" that could house an adult-friendly workspace and a kid-friendly place to gather. "They still wanted some of the garden to have a lawned area, too. There's nothing nicer than walking barefoot in the grass on a summer's day, after all," Hulsebos says. "The kids play hockey, so they also wanted a small hockey field area where the table tennis could also stand. When I presented them with my drawings, the clients said, 'Yes, but all of that will never fit in our garden!'"

The Mins couldn't have been more wrong. The back yard now boasts a variety of seating areas and surfaces that make this relatively small space bustle with activity. "I wanted to break open the garden so that they could experience the full possibilities here. That's why I chose clear, powerful lines. They immediately catch the eye, and it also looks very spacious," the landscape designer explains. Hulsebos



MAKE A PLAY

Rather than walling off the "game room," the designated spot for table tennis is made clear thanks to a paved border and a patch of evergreen, artificial grass.



ON THE BENCH

Landscape designer Danielle Hulsebos solved the mystery of how to place furniture around mature trees by commissioning custom pieces that make the conifers a built in design element.

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PRIME POSITION

An outdoor table and chairs tucked into the corner nearest the house make for a remote and comfortable setting for the homeowners to enjoy outdoor dining and gain easy access to the kitchen for extra helpings.

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> "I think it would have been a real shame if we'd had to close off this long, narrow garden with hedges or created totally separate rooms."

GO WITH THE FLOW

A wall mounted fountain adds a moment of serenity to the action packed surroundings.

LIGHT IT UP

Matte black, lantern style fixtures with incandescent Edison bulbs help the garden shine day and night.

also wanted the layout to be crystal clear. Near the house, there's a dining terrace that's adjacent to a lawn area with a lounging terrace and a water feature. Then there's an area for chilling out or practicing sports. The new garden house is at the very back, with a new storage room behind it. "The garden house is now a perfect place to work from home, but also a place where the young people can hang out," she says.

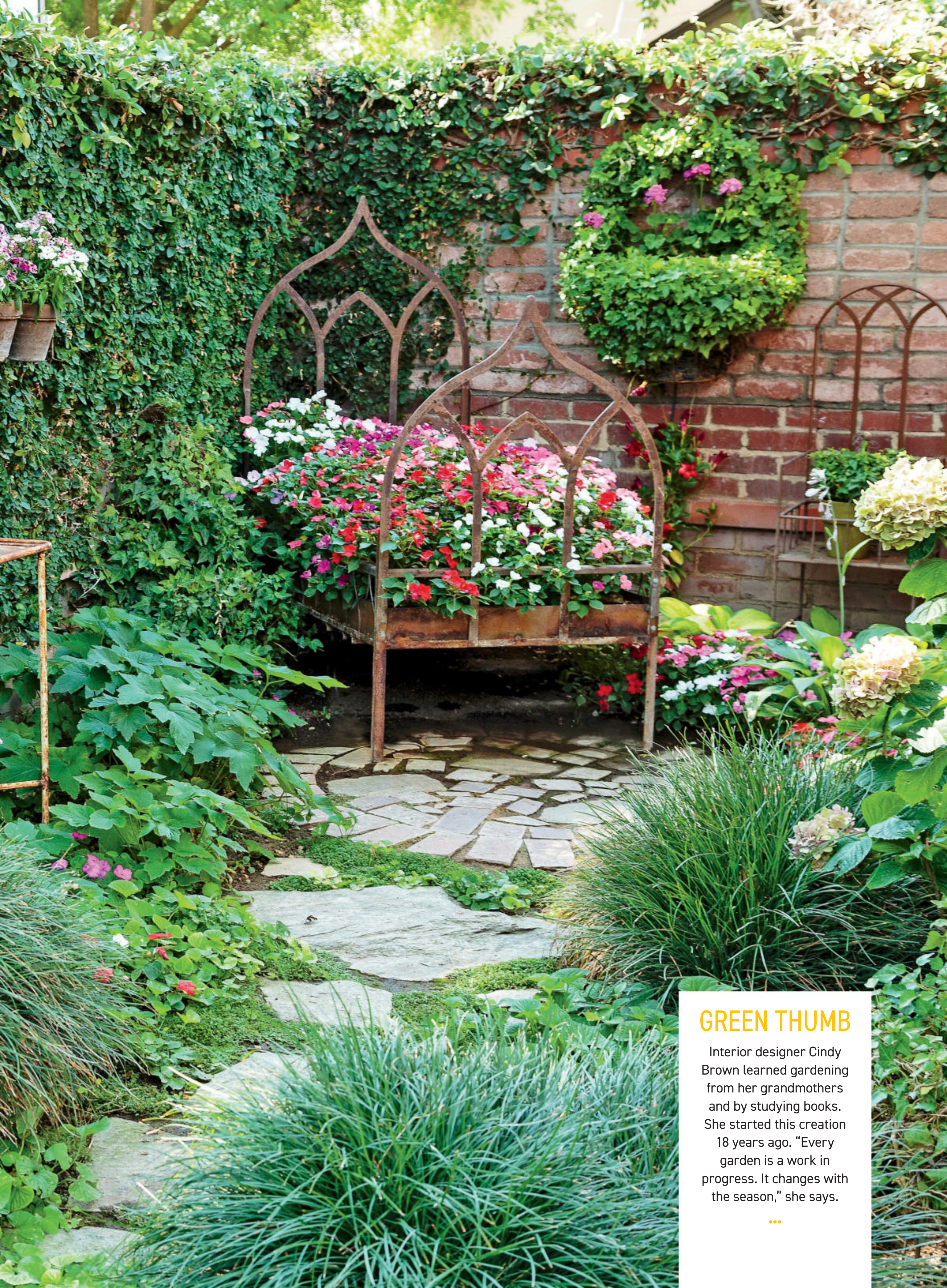
Despite the fact that the garden is divided into different spaces, it's meant to be enjoyed in its entirety. "I didn't want to divide the long garden into [separate] rooms, but on the other hand I did just that, but in an open way, so that everyone is able to enjoy their own place in this garden," she notes. A pergola spans across the garden, creating a kind of barrier without obstructing the view. Some of the furniture is built in, like a custom daybed on the "adult" side of the garden.

The pergola, along with a more transparent wall and the two white walls, make the garden feel and look wider, but they also make the space in front of the garden house more intimate. The pergola runs along the right side on the boundary of the yard, so it emphasizes the depth of the beds. In time, it will be covered by evergreen climbers.

Now that the backyard is more functional—and fun—Hulsebos is thrilled with the results. "I don't think you should be able to see everything in a garden at once, but you should be able to experience it as a whole."

Inside & OUT

A gardener's passion transforms a modest, neglected yard into an enchanted oasis that is as intimate and inviting as any interior space.



GREEN THUMB

Interior designer Cindy Brown learned gardening from her grandmothers and by studying books. She started this creation 18 years ago. “Every garden is a work in progress. It changes with the season,” she says.

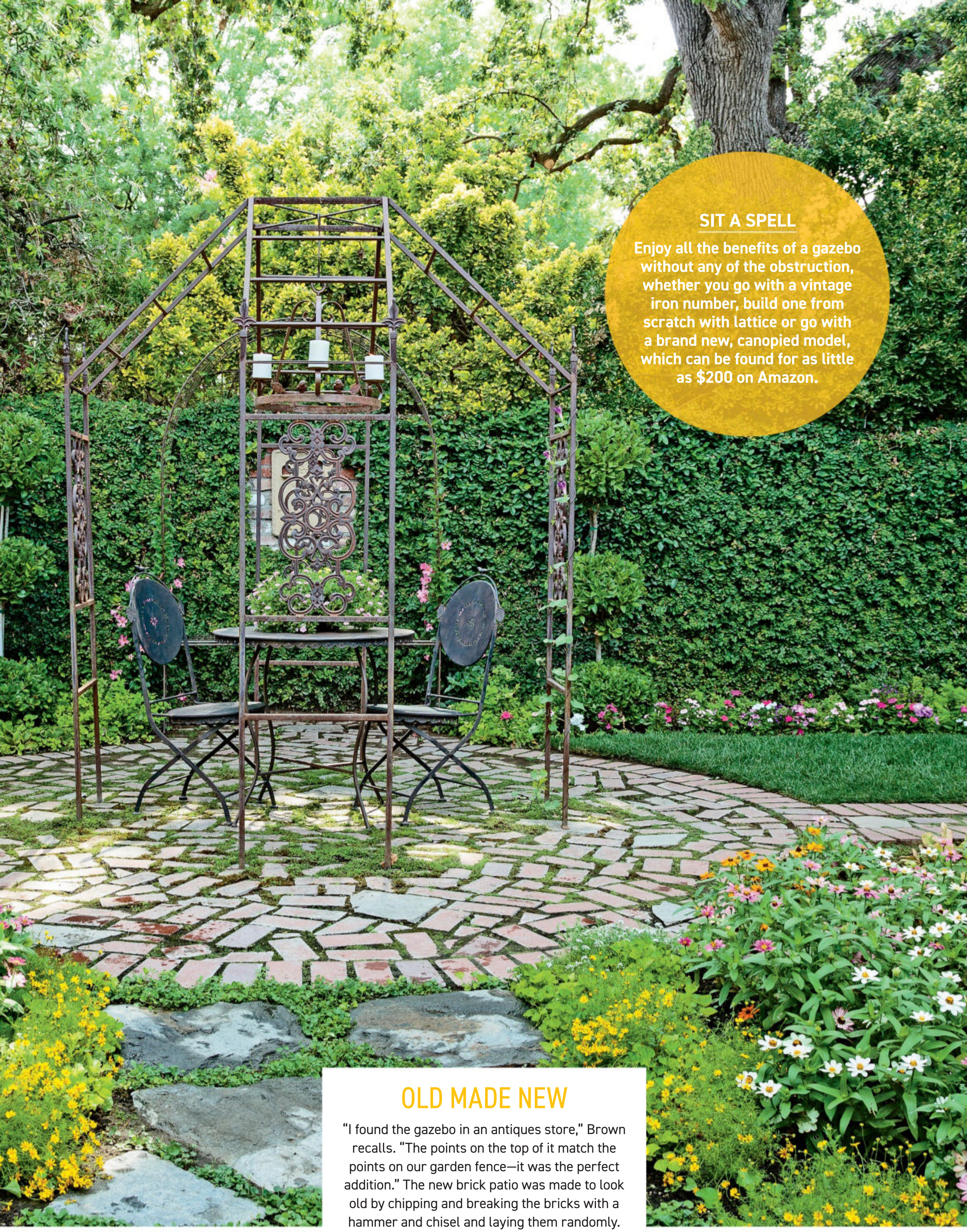
THE CHRONICLE OF THIS CHARMING garden began years ago, when Cindy Brown purchased her circa–1936 Fresno, California, cottage. Although the brick, Tudor style home looked like it came from the pages of a fairy tale, the surrounding garden was better suited for the macabre stories of Edgar Allan Poe. “There was a large hole in the ground in the front yard, along with a hodgepodge of dead plants,” says Brown. “But I saw its potential. I knew I could turn it into something beautiful.”

Even before Brown unpacked her last box, she began developing a landscape plan. “I bought the home in the spring, so it was the perfect time to start working,” she says. “In less than an hour, I drew a plan for where I wanted patios and paths and then dug in.” From the start, her vision was very clear. “I wanted the hardscape to have the same storybook look as the cottage,” she explains. “We found old bricks at a salvage yard and broke them up, and then laid them randomly inside designated borders so they would appear like they were original to the house.”

Flagstone paths complement the home’s stone trim, connect the patios and accentuate the garden’s eye catching flower beds. The round patio beneath the flowering bed and behind the garage is what the homeowner calls her “secret garden.” “My daughter was three when we made that patio, so it became her own little play space. We furnished it with a vintage, child size table and chairs. When she outgrew them, we added the iron bed.”

Brown made room for more furnishings like an old, chair-shaped plant stand and a vintage washbasin that showcases potted annuals. “I have every kind of rose in the garden,” she says. “Tea roses, English roses, miniature roses, climbing roses and tree roses.” When they are all in bloom, the color is captivating. “Only one plant is original to the property,” she notes. “There was one crimson rose bush that was in full bloom. It smelled so good, I couldn’t bear to take it out.”

Vintage iron settees and benches, placed to provide the best views of the garden, offer intimate niches to relax and enjoy nature. And even though space is limited, Brown is always on the hunt for more furnishings. “Antique, vintage and flea markets, yard sales and auctions—I go to them all. Finding treasures only makes working in the garden more enticing and makes every day a little happier.”



SIT A SPELL

Enjoy all the benefits of a gazebo without any of the obstruction, whether you go with a vintage iron number, build one from scratch with lattice or go with a brand new, canopied model, which can be found for as little as $200 on Amazon.

OLD MADE NEW

"I found the gazebo in an antiques store," Brown recalls. "The points on the top of it match the points on our garden fence—it was the perfect addition." The new brick patio was made to look old by chipping and breaking the bricks with a hammer and chisel and laying them randomly.

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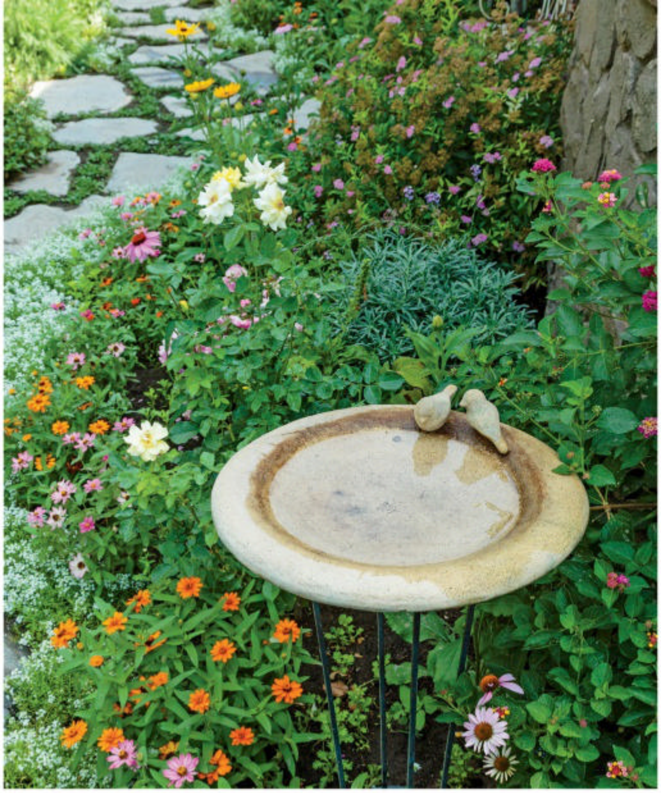
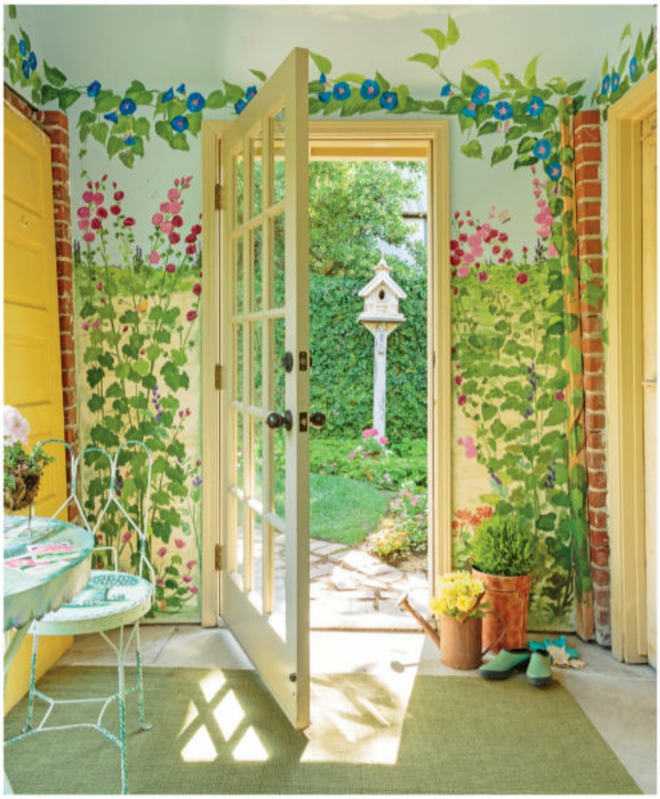


SWIM MEET

Do make room for pollinators. “Birdbaths are one of my garden themes,” says Brown.

IRON BUTTERFLIES

Yard art should always be a part of a little landscape. Here, iron butterflies keep watch over black-eyed Susans.

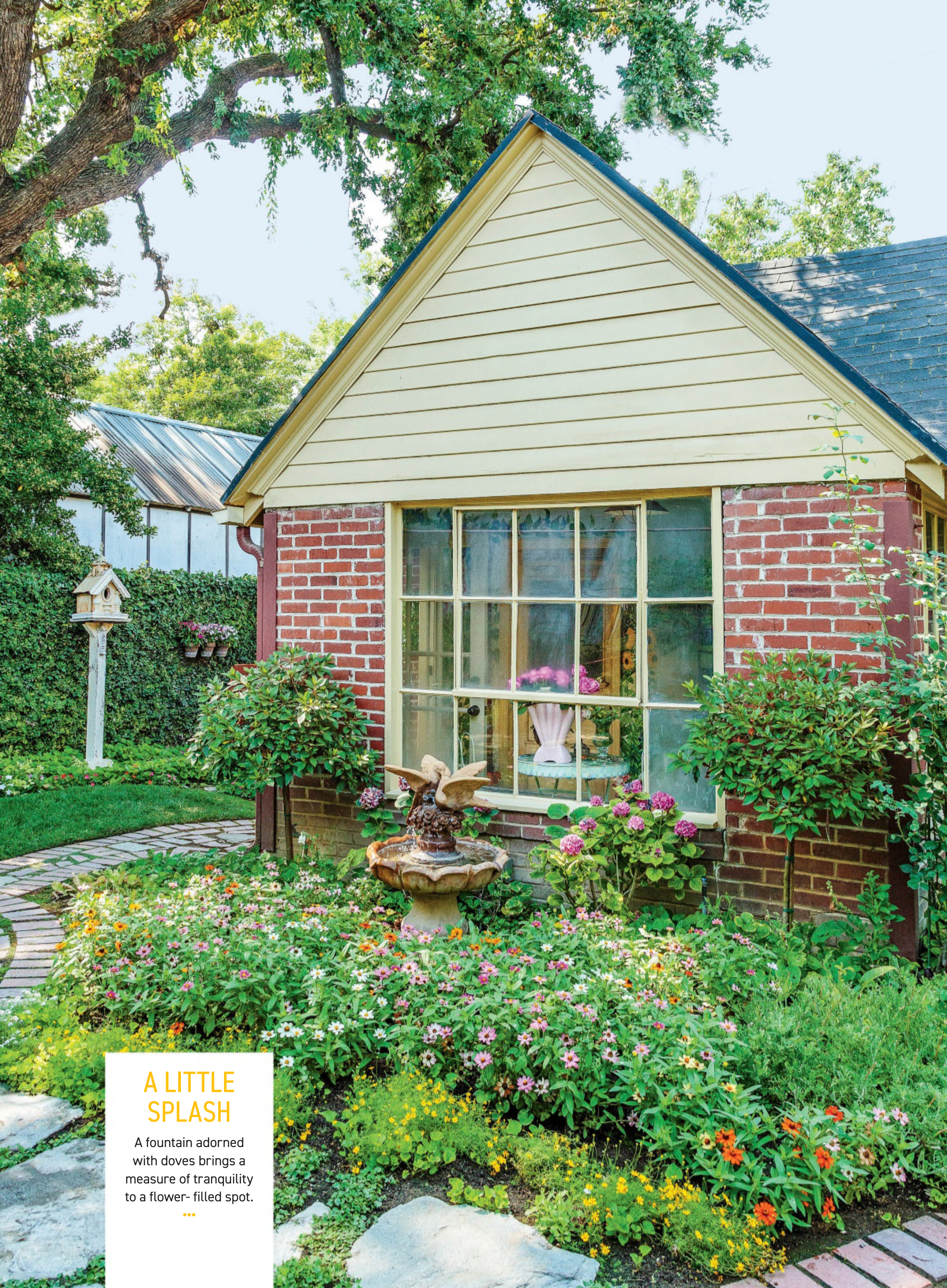


SEAMLESS TRANSITION

Brown made her tiny shed and garden feel like one bigger spot with hand-painted hollyhocks and morning glories.

DIAL IT BACK

Display fun finds without adding clutter. Here, mandevilla vines on a brick wall surround a sundial.



A LITTLE SPLASH

A fountain adorned with doves brings a measure of tranquility to a flower- filled spot.

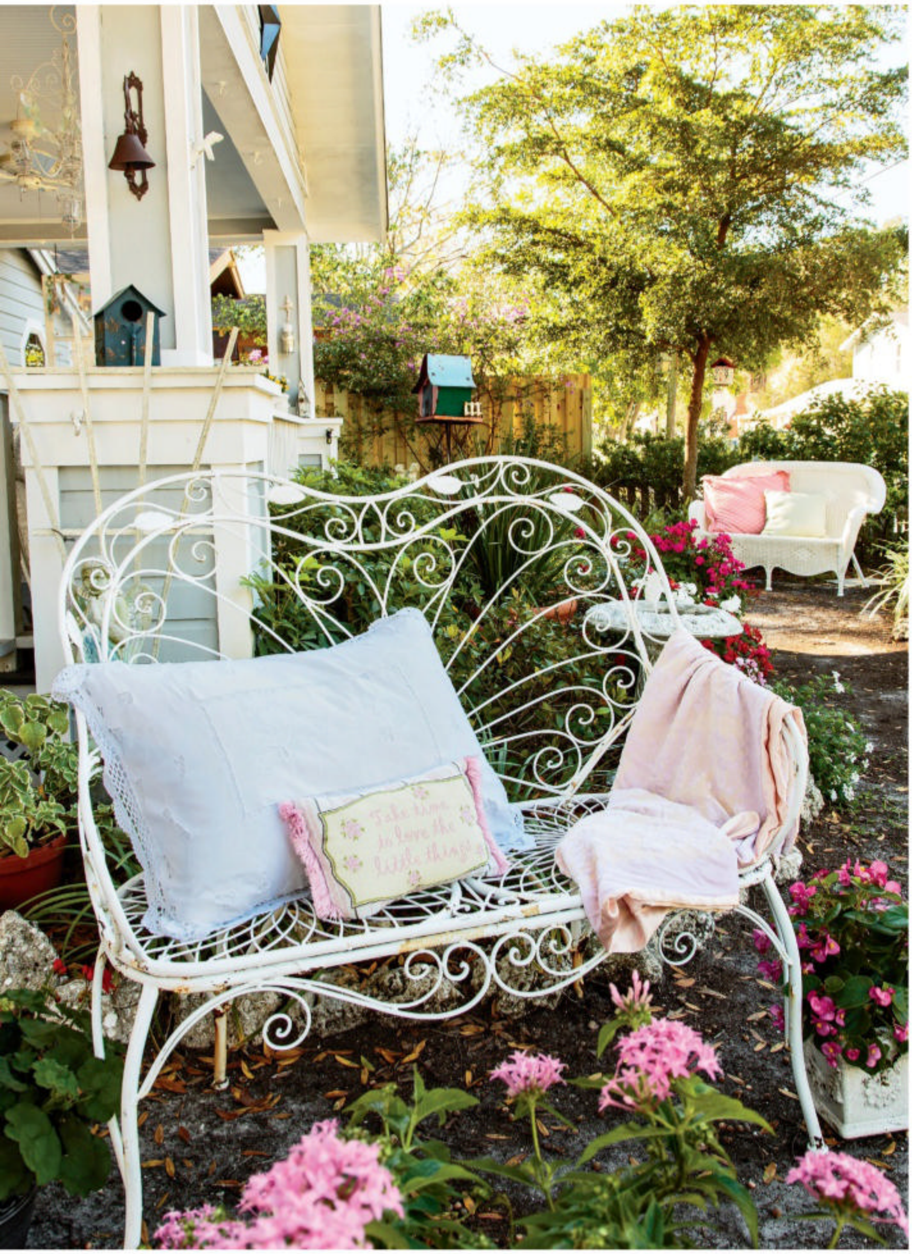
WARM WELCOME

The homeowner makes the most of her front porch with white wicker and assorted vintage pillows. A carpet grounds the seating area, while hanging an antique window frame is a great way to add a little privacy from the neighboring house without blocking light.

Artful RETREAT

Thanks to indigenous flora and thrift shop finds, a tiny Florida garden teems with old-fashioned charm.

“[Our front porch] has always been a non invitation, come as you are, welcoming kind of place in the neighborhood.”



PETITE SEAT

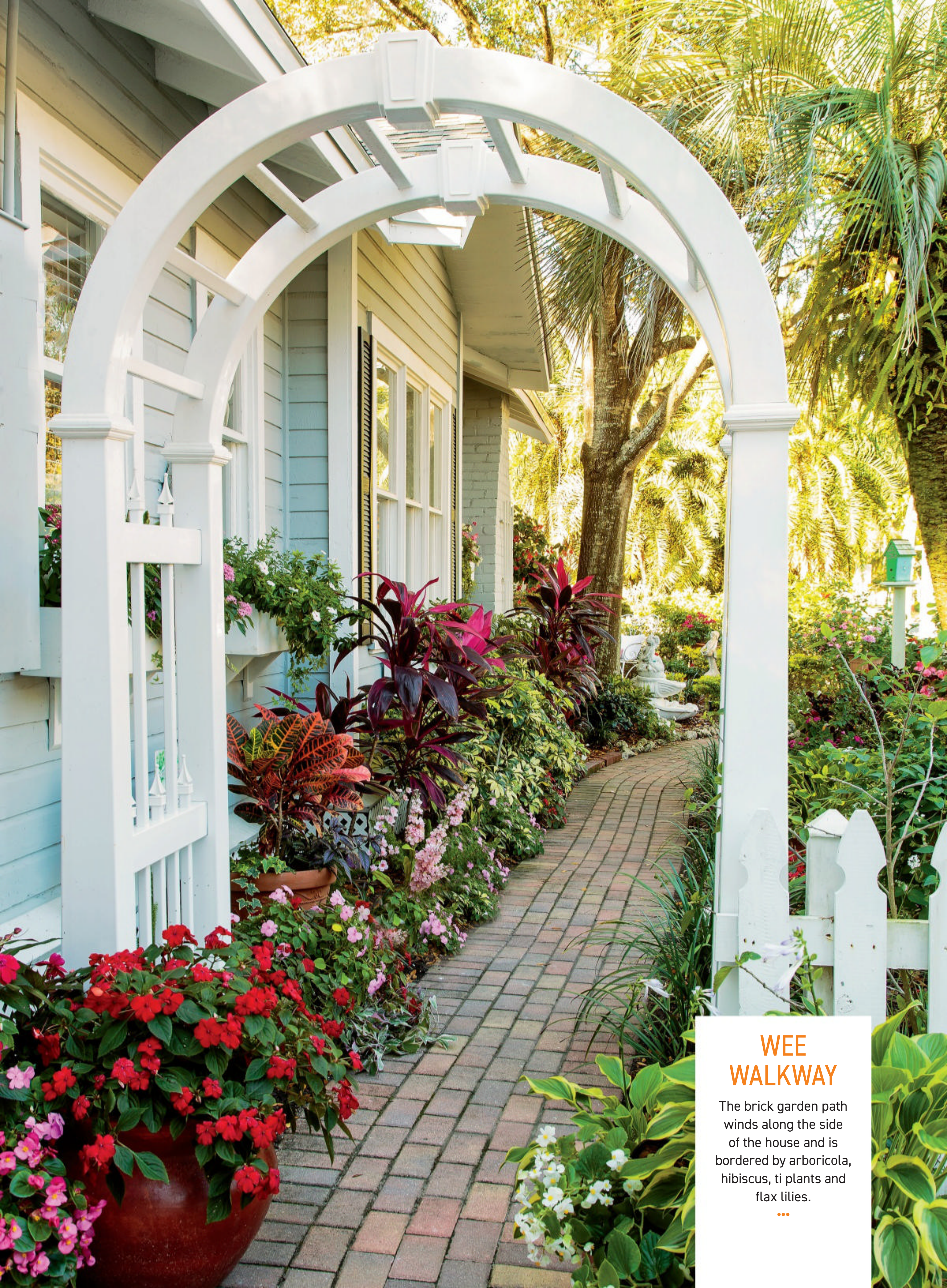
Forget oversized, overstuffed furnishings. Juanita Erazo settled on a wrought iron settee that fits in nicely and with the feminine setting, thanks to the curlicue details. “I like to create seating throughout the garden so we can take a break when working,” she says. “It's a nice place to sit and talk.”

WHEN THREE SISTERS FROM Brooklyn, New York, make a commitment to each other, they honor it. These women were determined to live in the same area when they retired someday, and they made that dream happen in a Sarasota, Florida, neighborhood dotted with 1920s cottages. Juanita Erazo, the green thumb of the trio, bought a circa 1925, vintage cottage in Gillespie Park with husband Wilfred. The house, located a stone's throw away from her sisters' Carmen and Esther's homes, was in need of sprucing up, both inside and out: The porch was empty, the patio nonexistent and the small yard was sand. “We always loved gardens,” says Erazo. “Nature is so inspirational, and we wanted to be surrounded with greenery and flowers.”

The couple brought in a local landscaper to help them lay a foundation to maximize the minimal space with lots of color via crepe myrtles, flax lilies, gardenias, hibiscus and more. The Erazos also carved out space for pots and window boxes filled with colorful annuals, such as begonias and geraniums. They added a winding path alongside the cottage and a private courtyard in the back to take full advantage of the Florida lifestyle and sunny weather.

Because the yard is small, Erazo wanted the porch to make a big impression. “We wanted a place that put a smile on the faces of passersby, a place for the neighborhood to enjoy and for us to be a part of the community,” she says. She transformed it into an important indoor/outdoor transition with vintage wicker furnishings, old pillows and a helping of antique linens. Although many of the larger pieces had made the trek from the Erazos' former home in Brooklyn, most of the accents were found at local flea markets, thrift stores and yard sales. The couple also added fun finds around the garden, creating vignettes and nooks.

“The porch is the place we use all the time when we're alone for coffee or lunch, but it's also where we visit with our friends, family and neighbors,” Erazo says. And, of course, it's the three sisters' favorite gathering spot to swap stories and enjoy a glass of white wine on a hot day.



WEE WALKWAY

The brick garden path winds along the side of the house and is bordered by arboricola, hibiscus, ti plants and flax lilies.

FOUL-WEATHER FANS

Make the front porch a year round destination—even in hot climates—by adding a ceiling fan or two. Makers like Hunter and Honeywell have a host of weatherproof models that are both high powered enough to cool a hot spot and stylish enough to suit any exterior.

SOLID DISPLAY

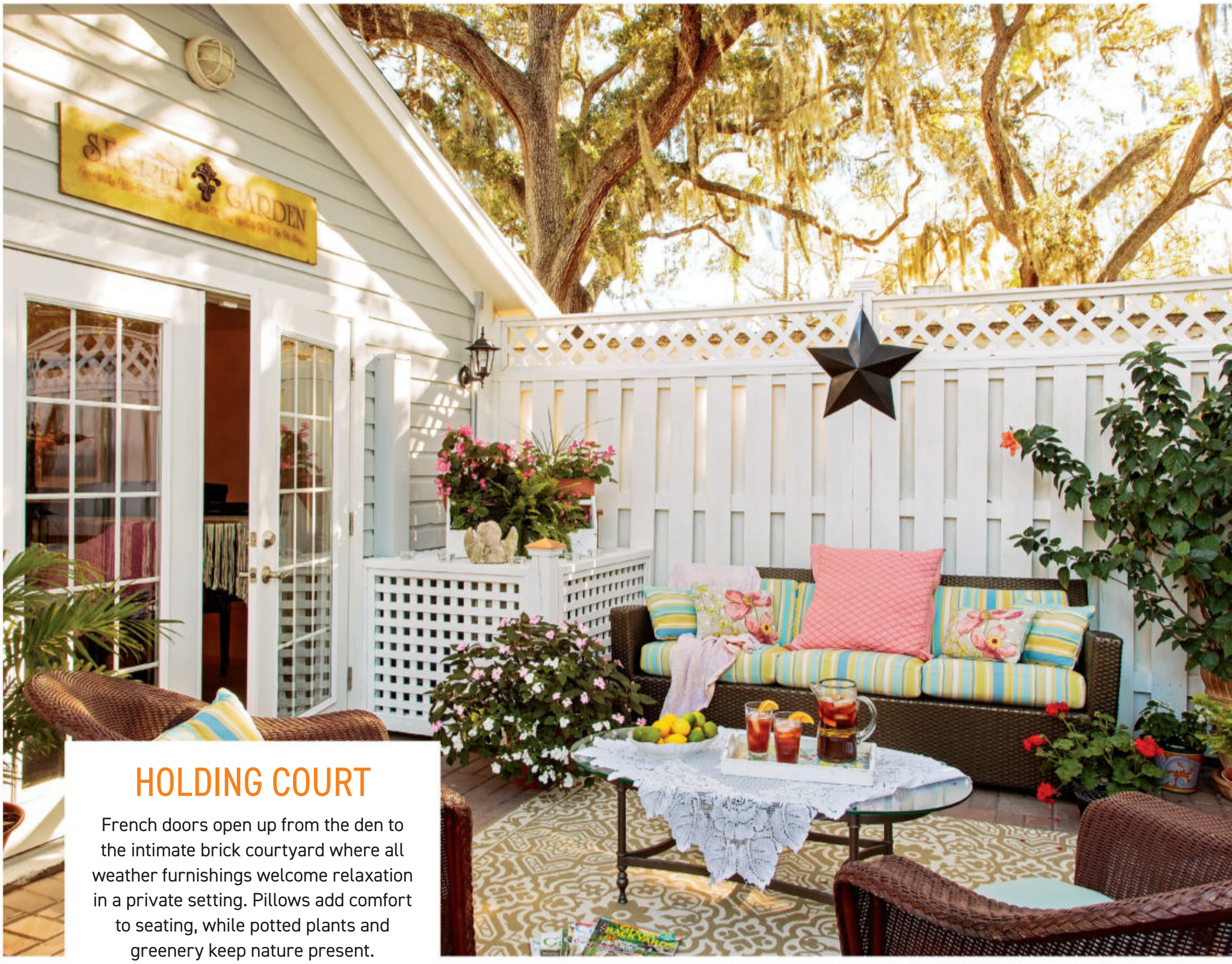
A small cherub rests on a concrete column set among protective foliage.

TWEET RETREATS

Birdhouses are another collectible that the couple keeps an eye out for wherever they go.

ON THE TABLE

White wicker furniture keeps the space from feeling too crowded and sets the stage for Erazo's prized finds.



HOLDING COURT

French doors open up from the den to the intimate brick courtyard where all weather furnishings welcome relaxation in a private setting. Pillows add comfort to seating, while potted plants and greenery keep nature present.

Finishing Touches

Once you've got the lay of the land figured out, take time to add the petite pièces de résistance.

PATIOS *Down Pat*

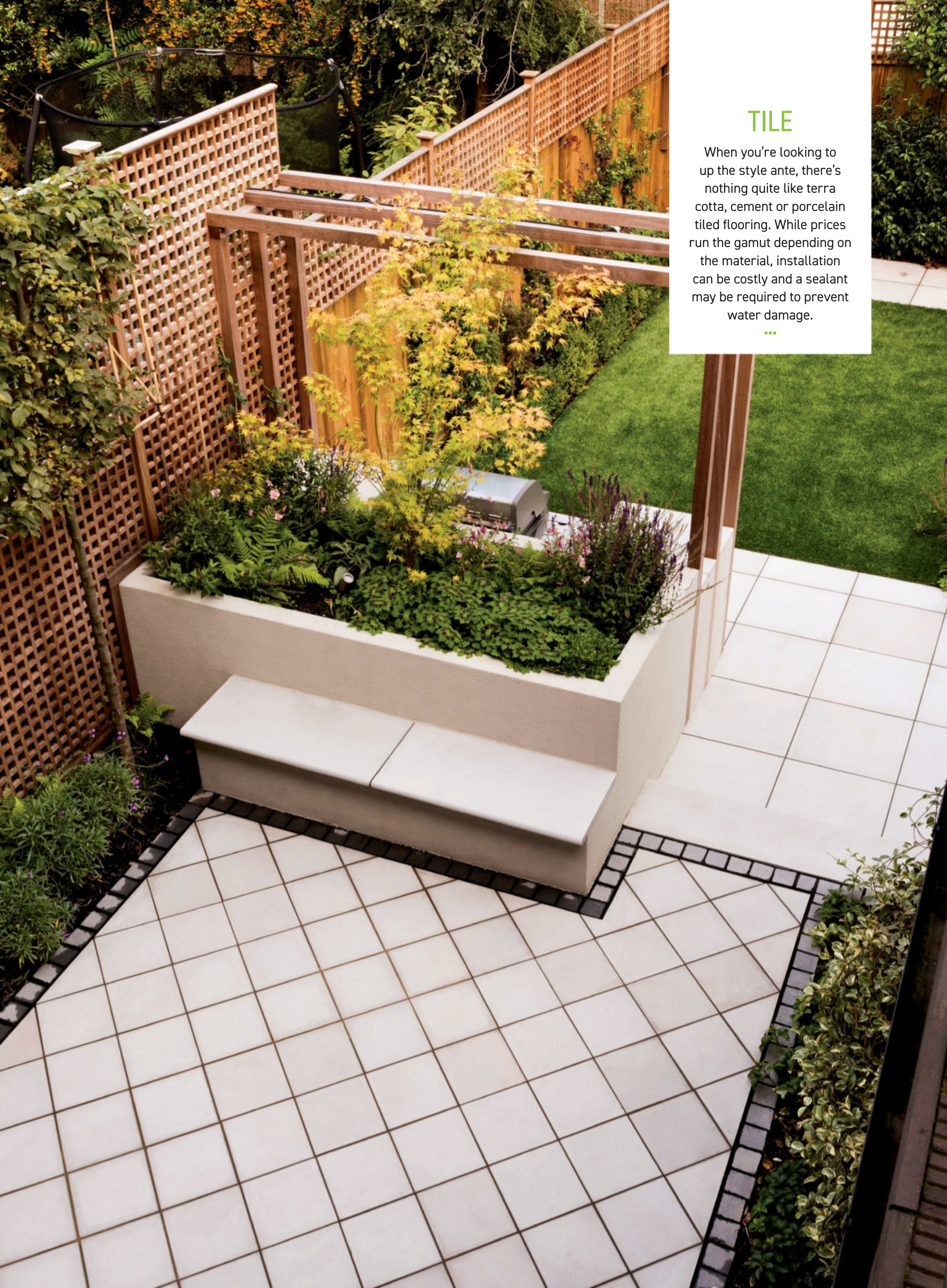
Maximize your outdoor living by laying out a pretty and practical yard.

WHEN SPACE IS LIMITED INSIDE, THERE'S NOTHING like being able to add to the livable square footage simply by opening the back door. That's where having a sturdy and attractive patio that's super inviting and ready made for hanging out and enjoying grilled treats with family and friends comes in. If you're less of a griller than a chiller, you can outfit your outdoor living area with a sofa, comfy chairs and television. For budding chefs, a level lanai is an opportunity to place pretty pots filled with herbs.

But before you start shopping for furnishings, choosing the right materials will set the stage for what's to come. And because this is no passing fancy, you need to be thoughtful about putting it in place. Consider the architectural style of your home—you want the transition from indoors to out to be fairly seamless. A patio should also enhance your yard and fit in with the garden style you've chosen. Picking the right paving materials will go a long way in getting you on the right path toward the perfect porch.

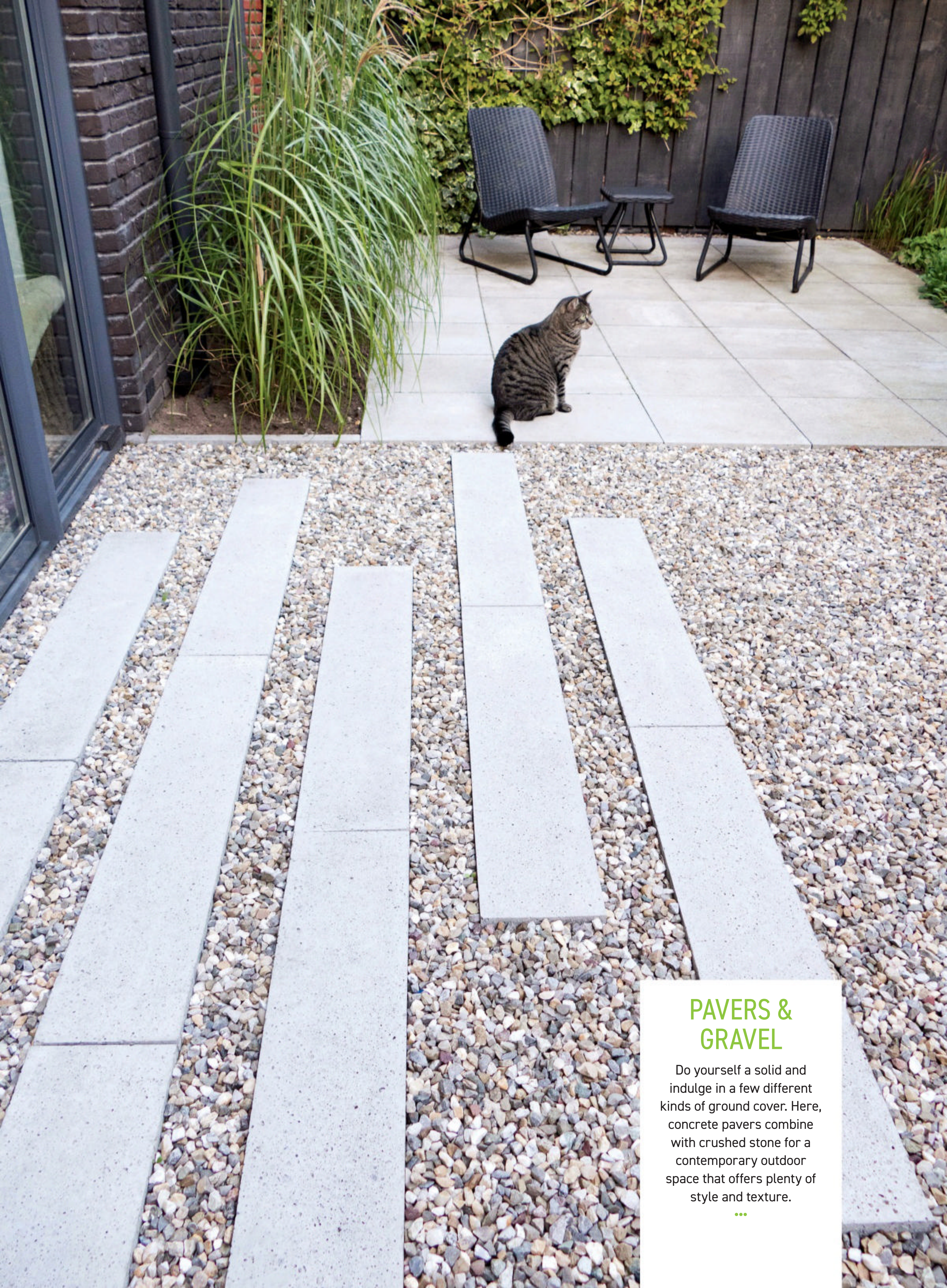
POURED CONCRETE

A simple slab is often the easiest solution. It can be poured in a single day and, depending on the dimensions, the costs remain low, averaging around $12 per square foot.



TILE

When you're looking to up the style ante, there's nothing quite like terra cotta, cement or porcelain tiled flooring. While prices run the gamut depending on the material, installation can be costly and a sealant may be required to prevent water damage.



PAVERS & GRAVEL

Do yourself a solid and indulge in a few different kinds of ground cover. Here, concrete pavers combine with crushed stone for a contemporary outdoor space that offers plenty of style and texture.

FLAGSTONE

This low-maintenance option is great for high traffic areas. Not only is natural stone gorgeous, it's also non slippery and can stand up to abuse from both Mother Nature and humans, which means it'll last through a few decades worth of house parties.

•••

BRICK

Bring a timeless aesthetic to the yard with the addition of a red bricked courtyard. For a little extra character, piece together vintage building blocks from purveyors like Old World Bricks (oldworldbricks.com).

•••

MAKE IT *Work*

With a little know-how and the right picks, even the tiniest backyards can meet great expectations.

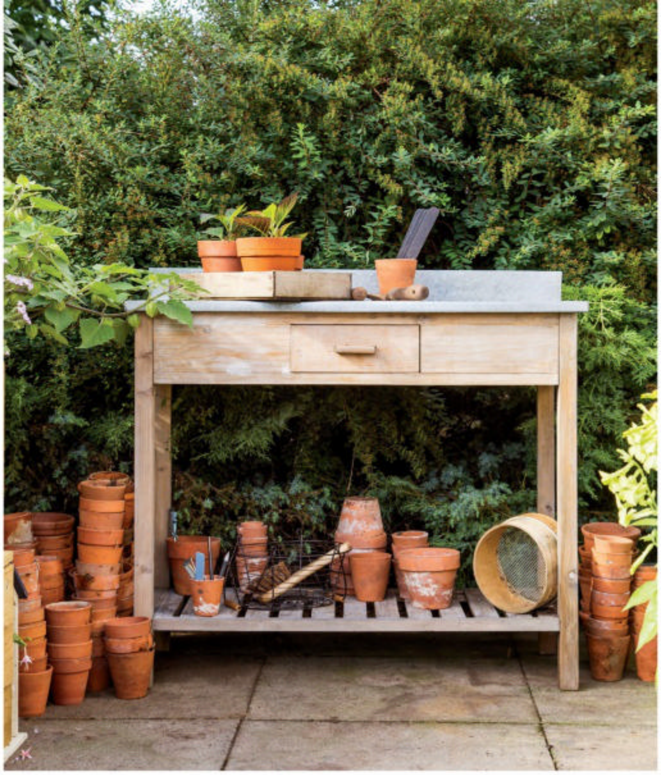
THE KEY TO SMART LANDSCAPE design is maximizing every inch of your property and planting picks that both have the best chance at thriving and offer interest throughout the year. But that's only part of it. When it comes time to add furnishings to your little piece of paradise, it makes sense to take your cues from interior designers.

You can use the very same tips and tricks that help make a small room appear larger to make a tiny yard feel roomier. Experts say that natural light goes a long way in opening up a space, so get rid of clutter and overgrown plants that make an area feel too dark or cramped. You can also add mirrors to help reflect additional light and create the illusion of more space. Floating benches, tables and workstations help keep floorspace unencumbered, which makes an outdoor "room" feel airier. If you prefer furnishings with legs, look for pieces that have clean lines and can do double or triple duty, such as benches that can be seating, potting stations and ledges for containers, seating with built in storage, or chests that work as coffee tables and offer a hiding place for bags of potting soil. When it comes to color, choose a palette and stick to it, with only a few bold elements like graphic pillows, a painted coffee table or even a fun focal point like a water feature.

Obviously, you'll want to keep scale in mind when you're buying furniture, but that doesn't mean that every single piece needs to be diminutive. In fact, if you're planning to host dinner parties, your table should be able to provide each guest with 18 to 24 inches of space, with 10 inches or so between place settings. But you also want your guests to be able to actually excuse themselves and walk away when the meal is done, so you need at least 3 feet on each side of the table for that to happen. So if your patio is 10 feet long by 8 feet wide, look for a table that's around 4 feet long by 2 feet wide. Choosing an array of smaller chairs will also help provide enough room for safe passage to and from the table.

BYE, BYE BUGS!

When you're looking for an all natural way to keep insects away, the right mix of plants will get the job done. Choose from fragrant (and tasty!) herbs such as lavender, basil, lemongrass and mint and annual flowers like petunias and chrysanthemums.



STATION AGENT

Create a multitasking workstation that offers enough counter space for pruning and potting, shelving for supplies and a drawer that will keep tools dry and protected.

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THE RIGHT STUFF

Options for right sized outdoor furniture sets abound thanks to makers like Pottery Barn (check out their "Apartment" line), Wayfair and World Market.

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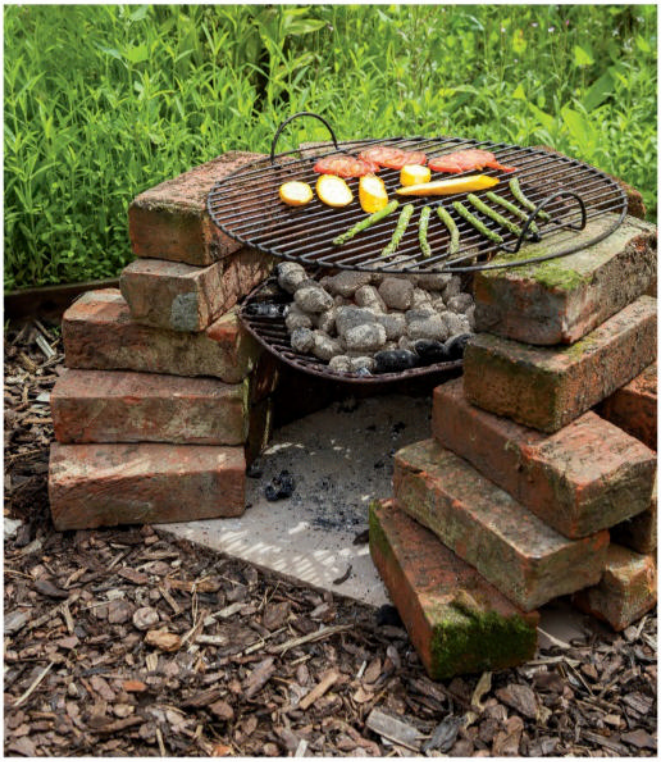

CHILL GRILL

Not every patio comes with an extra 7 feet available for a built-in stainless steel gas grill. Get scrappy with a DIY mini version via well-aged bricks and a barbecue grill set.

•••

KITCHEN ON WHEELS

No need to construct a built-in prep space. Gather the fruits of your labor and stir drinks at an all weather cart on wheels. When the party's over, simply roll it away.

•••

DYNAMIC DUO

When even the smallest sofa threatens to overpower a less than large outdoor living area, go with a pair of chairs instead. Natural fibers like rattan or wicker help keep the vibe light rather than littered.

COME INTO *Focus*

Add a sense of whimsy to your outdoor area—and pull attention from unwanted spots—with carefully curated lawn art.

EVEN THE SMALLEST OF GARDENS SHOULD APPEAL TO ALL THE SENSES. THAT MEANS CREATING a space that's chock full of color, thanks to thriving plants that are a sight to behold, are fragrant (without being overpowering), offer pleasing texture to the touch and even bring about some sounds via pollinators like chirping birds and buzzing bees. Plant the right things, and they're even tasty! But you can also add an extra layer of excitement for your eyes and ears with something that doesn't require a single scoop of fertilizer: a focal point. Whether you go with colorful yard art, a "found" item or a soothing fountain, a right-sized piece can be just the finishing touch you didn't know you needed.

FOR THE BIRDS

Dress the yard with pieces inspired by the pollinators you're hoping to attract. An assortment of cages, houses, feeders and baths make for artful additions.

•••

PET PROJECTS

The yard may not offer enough space for a menagerie of active animals, but that doesn't mean you can't adopt some form of canine, cat or canary statuary.

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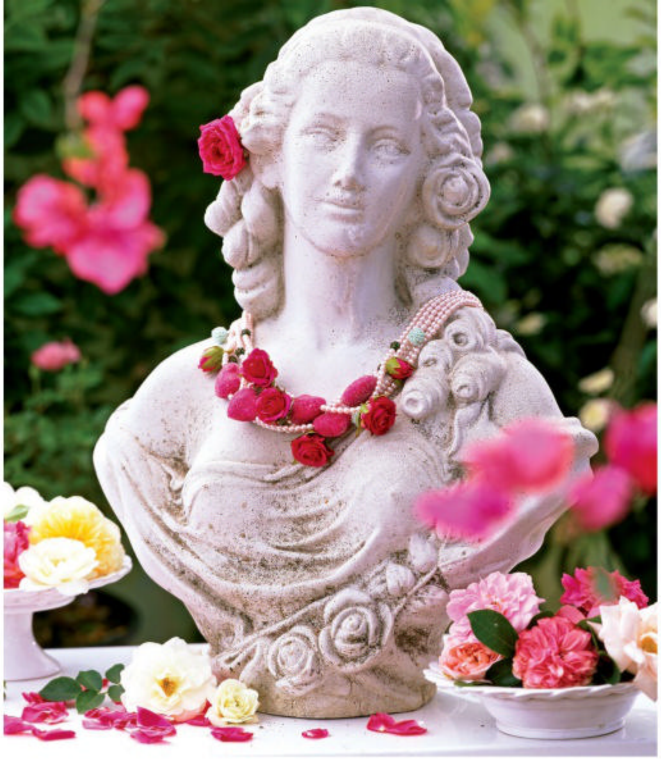
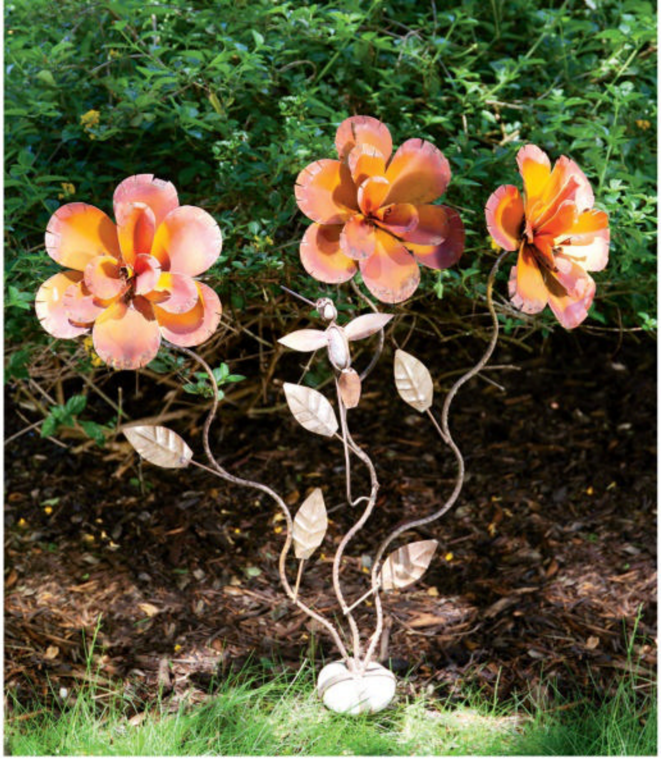


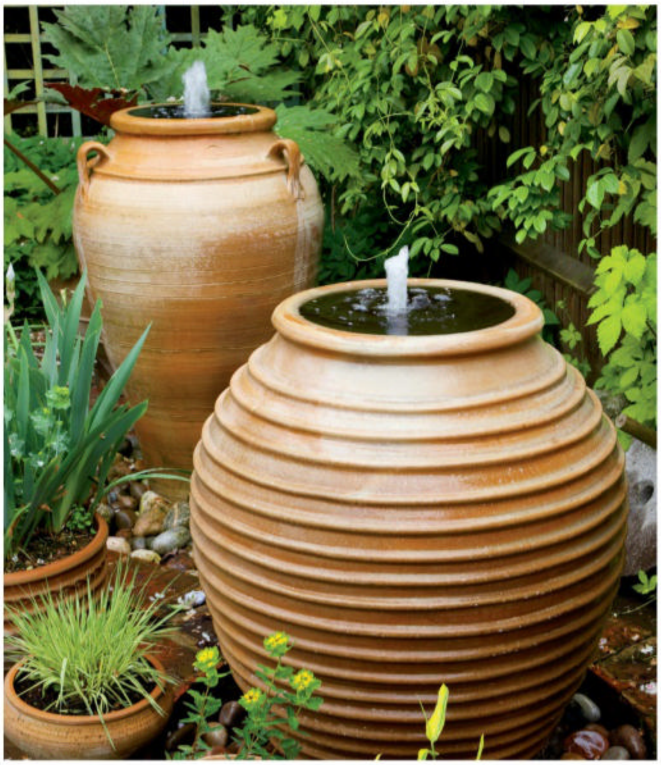
BUST A MOVE

Even if the back yard is far from formal, it always pays to up your head count. Lighten up a stately marble form with assorted blooms and accessories.



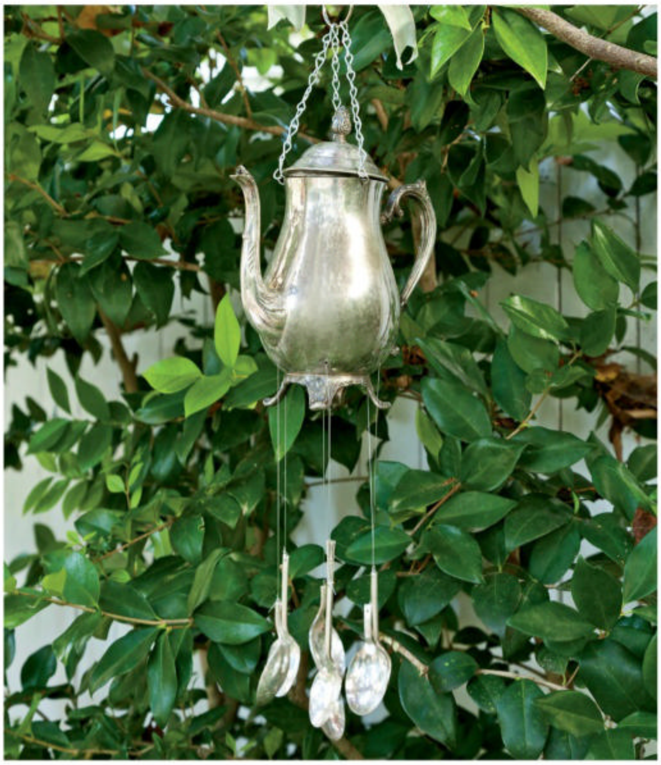
FLOWER POWER

When too much shade prevents natural blooms from thriving, look to a no-maintenance, metal bouquet to provide plentiful color and verve.



TRICKLE TREAT

A dramatic water feature needn't be expensive. Favored vessels can become fountains with the addition of a simple pump, available on Amazon for as little as $10.



OLD MADE GOLD

Transform flea market finds and secondhand treasures into works of art fit for a tree branch, along the fence or somewhere inside a blooming bed or border.

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